

How to Raise your Dragons

by Asteral de Tellimor

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Summary: Since Drago and his alpha were defeated at Berk, life has gone back to being quiet, relatively speaking. But one person in particular is not feeling the love - in any sense of the word. Will the arrival of some strangers from a foreign land change that - and potentially save an entire species of dragon from extinction?

1. This is Berk

Greetings, dear readers. As offerings to the mighty Aesir, I give you my first attempt at a HTTYD fanfic. As a friendly warning, this contains MANY, MANY SPOILERS for HTTYD2, so if you haven't been fortunate enough to go see it yet a. don't read this and b. GO WATCH IT as it is awesome. Anyways, all characters (except for original creations) belong to Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell, and not to me (very sad face). Enjoy! And pwease, pwease review. We have cookies! Well, virtual ones!

* * *

><p>This is Berk. Its ten miles west of the end of civilisation and twelve degrees north of where no one in their right mind would live. The food consists of mutton, fish and any combination of the above. For nine months of the year it snows â€“ for the other three, it rains. Endlessly. But it does have two features that make up for it. The first is that Astrid Hofferson, the love of my life, lives here, and the second are the pets.

Most people have terrapins or budgies, or even iguanas, but not us. We just had to take it to the next level. So, here in merry old Berk, we have a bunch of animals that we like to call dragons.

You see, we used to hate dragons with a vengeance. They would steal our sheep, burn down our buildings, and generally make life a living

hell. Making life in Berk worse than it already was is almost an achievement in itself, it must be said. But, five years ago, I shot down a Night Fury called Toothless (don't ask). And when I later found him where he had crash-landed on Raven's Point, I decided to save him. Yep, the first Viking in three hundred years that wouldn't kill a dragon. Also almost an achievement in itself.

In return, he showed me that dragons weren't the monstrous beasts that we thought they were, and by learning about his likes and dislikes, and creating a prosthetic tail-fin that helped him to fly again (with my help), I eventually learned how to tame all dragons.

Of course, Vikings being Vikings, we suffer from chronic stubbornness, and in order to convince my fellow Vikings that we could tame the dragons instead of massacre them, I had to take down the largest dragon ever seen, the Red Death, and lose my foot in the process (although that was really poetic justice â€“ I had shot off Toothless' tail, after all).

But, eventually, we learned to tame the dragons, and after a particularly violent encounter with a maniac named Drago Bludfist, I even found my long-lost mother, Valka, and the realisation that dragon riding actually ran in the family.

But not everything worked out. Drago's alpha dragon possessed Toothless, and forced him to kill me. He would have succeeded, had my dad, Stoick the Vast, not taken the shot for me. My best friend had been forced to murder my father. It was that day that I realised the true nature of evil, and that it wore the face of Drago Bludfist. When we eventually made it back to Berk, (Never, ever, ever attempt to ride a baby dragon. Trust me.) it took all of mine and Toothless' collective willpower to break him of the spell that the alpha had him under.

And then we discovered that alpha dragons aren't actually a species, when Toothless managed to beat down the alpha and free all our dragons from its control, and the control of Drago Bludfist (now that is an achievement).

Now, Toothless is the alpha of all of Berk's dragons, and I'm the somewhat reluctant chieftain of all of Berk's people. For once, everything seems to be absolutely wonderful, but in the back of my mind, I can't ignore the fact that Drago, the man who murdered my father, is still out there, and so is his alpha. Drago managed to raise a dragon army once, and I would be a fool if I didn't think that he would try to do so again. The world needs Drago gone, and the next time we cross paths, I won't be so merciful.

But for now, everything is wonderful. The sun is shining, Terrible Terrors are singing on the rooftops, and everyone has their dragons back. It would take an awful lot to improve on that. But, luckily for me, my beloved Astrid is making a magnificent effort to do just that â€“ or would be if I wasn't the one making hot, sweet love to her right now, and probably annoying the neighbours with her howling to the moon.

* * *

><p>Astrid writhed in ecstatic pleasure beneath the body of her

boyfriend, Hiccup, his deft ministrations and his disproportionately large manhood doing their utmost to bring her to the very heights of sexual pleasure.<p>

"Faster, Hiccup. Please!" She moaned, her eyes hooded and her bare chest rising and falling with her deep panting.

"As you wish, milady." Hiccup obliged, ever the gentleman, eliciting a scream from his beloved as she came for the third time, and not too soon either, for a moment later, Hiccup uttered an uncharacteristically manly growl as his own orgasm sent shivers up his spine. Utterly spent from an afternoon of worshipping each other, he collapsed next to his girlfriend, pulling her into a tight embrace, her body still shuddering from the treatment that his ministrations had put her through. She snuggled against his body, still riding out the last waves of her orgasm.

"Wow," she murmured. "Since when did you get so good between the sheets?"

"Let's just say," Hiccup placed his hands behind his head in a somewhat confident manner. "There was more than one reason my father was called Stoick the Vast."

Astrid laughed, an infectious giggle that soon had Hiccup joining in.

"Well, I would say I envied your mother, but then I have you to make up for that."

"Wow, Astrid." Hiccup smiled. "You might well be the first person to compare me and dad in a positive light, even if it is a little!"

"I wouldn't exactly call it little." She teased him in a sultry voice.

"Well, in that case, I'll quit while I'm ahead." They both laughed again, until Hiccup silenced them with a deep, sensual kiss that Astrid returned with equal vigour. They stayed that way for a minute or two, until they had to come up for air.

"Astrid?"

"Yes, Hiccup?" She smiled.

"I don't know what I did to deserve you, but promise me that you'll never let me stop doing it."

"I promise, my love." She kissed him again. "And, for the record, what you did, my darling, is be an utter coward."

"I â€“what?!"

"You were the first Viking in three hundred years who wouldn't kill a dragon. And because you are also the bravest man alive, you aren't the only one who wouldn't anymore." He couldn't help but smile at his beloved, before they shared in a heated kiss that led to another round of holding tight and making drowsy, as it were.

And as he did, a voice in the back of his head that sounded remarkably like his father said, _Hiccup, marry her. Trust me, this one's the one._

Hiccup smiled internally. _I know, dad. I know._

* * *

><p>Meanwhile, Toothless was lazing in the sun in the centre of the village, completely oblivious (Well, maybe not completely) to his rider's, ahem, activities with his girlfriend. A small girl was happily sitting on his shoulders, scratching the sides of his neck, eliciting a gentle purr of happiness from the dragon.</p>

Being the chief's dragon, Toothless became quite popular with the villagers, especially the younger children. His almost ridiculous combination of jet black alpha predator body and adorable wide-eyed expressions made him approachable to just about anyone. He never wanted for friendship, or at the very least companionship and attention, and there was always someone who would feed him a fish at some point.

And that was the very thing that was making Toothless rather depressed.

It had all started when Stormfly, his loyal cohort and best friend (well, except for Hiccup, obviously), hooked up with a particularly handsome purple Nadder named Typhoon. **(A/N: Please don't ask me how Vikings are familiar with the concept of typhoons, they just are. This is a story with dragons, for crying out loud.) **They started seeing each other, and in less than a week, Toothless had resorted to sleeping in Hiccup's house, because Hiccup and Astrid having sex was a damn sight quieter than Stormfly and Typhoon going at it like, well, dragons.

Toothless found himself becoming rather jealous of the couple. At first he assumed it was down to a few unconfessed, and previously unrealised, feelings of romantic affection for Stormfly, but he quickly dismissed that. They had been friends for years, especially since their riders were, intimate with each other, and had been since they were sixteen years old, and besides, he and Stormfly weren't even the same species.

And then it hit him. The reason for his enmity towards them was not that he was jealous of them personally â€“ he was envious that they had a relationship that he could never have.

He had never met another Night Fury. According to some of the dragon elders, an old Zippelback had brought his egg to the nest some 20 years ago, and when he hatched, they had raised him to serve the Red Death. They had no idea where the Zippelback had brought him from â€“ largely because the Red Death ate him before he had the chance to tell anyone. So, Toothless accepted that he was an orphan, even by dragon standards, and simply lived his life as well as he could. But now, what with Drago gone and everybody pairing off, he was feeling rather left out. Hence his depression.

Not even Valka knew if there were any others, and she had privately confessed to Hiccup once that she suspected he really was the last of his kind. Before Stoick had, passed, Hiccup had once suggested that

they begin actively searching for other Night Furies, but now he was busy with his duties as chieftain (when he wasn't fucking Astrid's brains out) so any plans for a lengthy exploration tour had been put on hold.

And so, with such cheerful thoughts to occupy his time, Toothless simply relaxed and let the children play on him. After all, it's not like he would be having any children of his own any time soon to occupy his attention.

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><p>Gobber was down at the forge, making a few non-essential repairs to some non-essential things, whilst trying to figure out the composition of the metal that made up the armour that Drago's dragons had sported, when Snotlout ran into the forge.<p>

"Why, hello there, Snotlout. Anything I can do fer yer - "

"Sound the alarm! Something's approaching the village, and none of us have any idea what it is! The dragons won't go near it, not even Hookfang!"

"A'right, a'right, don' panic. I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation." Gobber hobbled outside, never having quite mastered the grace of walking with a prosthetic leg that Hiccup had, and stared into the sky.

"I don' quite see what yer scared o', Lout. Maybe it were just a funny shaped cloud, or - " Then he saw it. A strange, elongated structure, flying slowly towards Berk. It was then that he realised that he knew exactly what he was looking for and where he had seen it before.

"SOUND THE ALARM! SOMEBODY GET HICCUP!" Gobber screamed, running for the Meade Hall. "GET THE PATROLS AIRBORNE!"

"What is it, Gobber?" Snotlout called.

"Hell, lad," he glanced fearfully at the thing, visibly paling as it descended towards Berk with a certain finality, as if the gods themselves had given it the authority to do so. "Hell on Earth."

2. New Friends, Old Nightmares

Greetings, wonderful readers. The response to my first chapter was phenomenal, thank you all for taking the time to read it! Special thanks go to Backlash 42 for reviewing; I hope you won't be disappointed by the reveal at the end.

DISCLAIMER: I do not own (and almost certainly never will) any and all characters from HTTYD.

New Friends, Old Nightmares

Hiccup was downstairs, making a late lunch for him and Astrid, when Snotlout burst in to their house. Thankfully, he had redressed before coming downstairs, not that he would have cared much anyway after he

had heard what Snotlout said.

"Hiccup!"

"Oh, hey Snotlout. What's the rush - "

"You've gotta come, quickly! Gobber's raised the alarm, something's attacking Berk!"

Hiccup immediately dropped the knife he was holding and ran after Snotlout, thankful that he had gotten dressed earlier, and doubly thankful that he had chosen to dress in his flight suit. Toothless landed a moment later, leaning his head down to allow Toothless to climb on.

"What is it exactly, Lout?" Hiccup asked, his voice muffled by his flight helmet.

"I don't know. All I know is that it's big, fast and flies. Hookfang and I almost flew right into it."

"OK. Go round up the others, get a posse together." He and Toothless prepared to take off, but Snotlout stopped him.

"Chief," That got his attention. Snotlout had never called him chief before, and had never spoken so seriously to him before either. "Be careful up there. That, ship, was sporting weapons like I've never seen before. She's armed, and I don't think they'll think twice about using those weapons. Gobber literally paled when he saw it. There's more going on here than we know."

"Ok. Thanks, Snotlout." He prepared to bounce, then had a thought. "Arm your men with fire arrows, just in case. And prepare the catapults and ballistae. If they attack the village in any way, blow them out of the sky."

"Yes, chief." Snotlout answered, seeing the dire seriousness of the situation as Toothless took off. Hiccup had never advocated violence over peace, but then he had never been called upon to defend Berk itself before. He hadn't truly had a real test of his abilities to lead yet — who knew what he would do when the people he loved and had sworn to protect came under attack?

* * *

><p>As Toothless and Hiccup flew forwards to engage the newcomer, Gobber began to marshal the warriors on the ground.</p>

"A'right, listen up! Berk is about to come under heavy fire. Snotlout, I need yer to lead an aerial assault team, try to distract that thing until the catapults are ready. Take twenty riders and give 'em hell. I need forty of us to man the defences. The rest of yer, evacuate everyone to the Meade Hall and bunker down. No one leaves it until either me or Chief Hiccup gives the word. Now get to it!" Everyone gathered immediately went about their tasks, except for Snotlout, who grabbed Gobber by the arm and asked, "Gobber, what is it we're fighting? I can't lead my team blind."

"That thing is what is called an airship. Don' ask how it works, I don' know. Many years ago, before y'all were born, Stoick and I went

exploring with a couple of the lads, yer old man included. We were swept up in a huge storm for three days. When we finally escaped the maelstrom, we were miles off course, and lost. For days we searched fer an island or another ship, until we came across this airship." He took a deep breath, as though recounting a painful memory. "The attackers came out of nowhere. They dropped on lines from the ship and seized the vessel. They captured us, and were about to set fire to the ship, when our luck turned for the better. A group of dragons had chosen that moment to attack the airship. In the confusion, we wrestled free and dispatched the wee bastards. That night, we used the stars to navigate our way home, and when we returned, Stoick and I reported what we had seen to his father, the then chieftain." He turned to look at Snotlout with fear in his eyes. "E'er since that day, we vowed that we would always be on the alert for another airship. Fer not only were they strong, but they had weapons and technology the likes of which we had never seen before. As the years passed, and we saw no sign of them, we finally began to relax. But Stoick and I never forgot that day. We still feared they would follow us, and attack us. And nowâ€œ now that day has come." He grabbed Snotlout by the shoulders and looked him straight in the eyes. "Snotlout, that machine brought only death for us, and we have no reason to believe it won't do so now."

"But, just because they attacked you once doesn't mean they're here to start a war."

"That's cause I haven't told you who they worked fer."

"Well, who?" Gobber looked at him with the finality of death itself.

"They worked fer Drago Bludfist."

* * *

><p>Snotlouts team were airborne now, and Hiccup fell in to their ranks.</p>

"Do we know what it is yet?" He called to Snotlout.

"Gobber says it's something called an airship." He called back.

"What the heck's an 'airship'?"

"No idea. But he says that he encountered one years ago. They attacked him and your father, mine too."

"Ok, but why does he think they'll do the same again now?"

"Because they work for Drago!" At the sound of that name, Hiccup's expression turned stern, almost feral, and his vision turned red. So, Drago couldn't take Berk with a dragon army, and now he intends to try with this, airship. Toothless hovered in place, and everyone gathered around their new chieftain.

"Listen to me," he called to them, a serious tone colouring his voice. "Drago Bludfist thought he could beat us with a dragon army, destroy us using the very things that make us strong. But he failed, and now he seeks to do the same with something none of us have ever

seen before. He killed my father, and forced my best friend to do it for him." Toothless pined, still scarred by the incident. "That day, Drago made a very powerful enemy. The blood of my father, the dragons he enslaved and everyone else he has killed or had killed on his path to power is on his hands now, and I intend to collect on that debt with his life." There were murmurs of agreement amongst the riders. "Today, we show him what the Vikings of Berk are truly made of. Today we show him the true power of the dragons!" That roused a cheer, and as Toothless launched towards the airship, they all fell into formation behind him, and prepared to attack the airship.

As Hiccup stared down his greatest nemesis, he saw something detach from the bottom of the ship, and so did Snotlout.

"Looks like he's still using dragons to do his dirty work."

"Yeah," Hiccup answered, but then he saw the dragon. Saw that it had four wings. And then realised that he was very familiar with this particular dragon.

"Wait a second!" He said, and then Snotlout saw it as well.

"Wait. Hiccup, that's Cloudjumper!"

"That's my mother!"

Cloudjumper flew up towards them, Valka standing atop his shoulders, her arms wide in a placating gesture, signalling the other riders to stand down.

"Hiccup!" she called. "Stand down, son. It's not what you think!"

"What I think? Gobber's the one who's panicking."

"He would, although understandably." She turned to Snotlout. "Go and tell Gobber to stand down, before he does something stupid."

"Yes, ma'am." He replied, always strangely formal in front of Valka, before guiding Hookfang back to the ground.

"Mom, what's going on? Gobber said that these people worked for Drago!"

"The ones he encountered did, but these are different people. People we can trust."

"How can you be sure of that?"

Valka looked into his eyes, her expression similar to that of when she had told him she was his mother for the first time.

"We can trust him, Hiccup, because he's my brother."

3. The Artemis Descends

**Salutations, dear readers. Just to clarify a few points that will come up from now on, with the advent of airship technology, I thought it safe to assume that airship captains have travelled a fair bit, so

our story may take us all across the globe and back again (and, knowing me, a damn sight further again). Shoutouts and virtual cookies go to GwuncanGirl0203, madeline . kallis and especially to Backlash 42 for their reviews. You have my infinite thanks and appreciation.**

DISCLAIMER: Despite my best attempts (Friendly Tip: NEVER ATTEMPT TIME TRAVEL!) I do not own the HTTYD franchise or any of it's characters, but my dear OC'S are mine, so I suppose that makes up for it. Sniffle.

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><p>The Artemis Descends

The airship descending towards Berk was called the S.S. Artemis. It was the name of a Greek goddess, although most of the crew didn't know that.

It's captain, however, was a well-travelled man, and thus knew that Artemis was the Greek hunter goddess, who once killed a man for simply seeing her naked. It was an apt name for the ship, he thought, as it used to be a hunter of dragons, when it was under the command of Drago Bludfist. Now, it was still a hunter, though its quarry had changed. Instead of hunting dragons, it now hunted the dragon hunters themselves.

Captain Traask Faetherson stood up from the captain's chair, the old leather squeaking in protest. He exited the bridge, after giving his pilot orders to continue their descent, and walked along the external gantry to the exposed foredeck. Once there, Traask took a spyglass from a pocket inside his coat and put it to his right eye. He focussed it on Cloudjumper, the dragon that his sister, Valka, was flying, and saw her communicating with the lead dragon rider that had come out to meet them. Being an expert lip reader, he quickly surmised that she was actually talking to her son.

His nephew.

He shifted his focus to his nephew now. He was clad in a leather flight suit, obviously designed and made for him, probably by him. The workmanship of the material was too flawless for it to be otherwise. Then his gaze drifted down to his dragon, and Traask almost dropped the spyglass in shock.

There, right before his very eyes, was a Night Fury. So, he thought to himself. That's why Drago is on the run. Captain Faetherson put his spyglass away, and allowed himself a small smile. It would be his sister's son who managed to tame and befriend the rarest and deadliest of all dragons.

After all, he had managed the same feat himself.

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><p>Valka and Hiccup landed outside the Meade Hall, where Snotlout was trying to stop Gobber from firing on the airship. Emphasis on the word 'trying', of course.<p>

"Gobber, please, I saw Valka fly out of that thing, it can't be -

"

"I don' care if you saw a Valkyrie fly out of it and blow yer a kiss on the way back to Valhalla, that thing is hostile, and I will defend this village with my life against it if I have ter! Now get out me way, laddie!" He turned to see Hiccup and Valka walking towards them. "Ah, finally, someone with an ounce o' sense between their ears. Hiccup, Snotlout here was trying to stop me from firing on that -"

"Stand down Gobber," Hiccup ordered. "The situation has, changed."

"What? Not you too?" Gobber exasperated.

"Gobber, that ship isn't working for Drago anymore." Valka assured him.

"And how in Thor's name would yer know that, Valka?" Valka took both his hands in hers, before looking straight at him.

"Because Traask is her captain." The only time Hiccup had ever seen Gobber pull the expression he did now was five years previously when he had managed to 'encourage' the Zippleback that was now Barf and Belch back into its cage during dragon training.

"Traask?" Gobber asked, disbelievingly. Valka nodded, a smile slowly spreading across her face.

"He's alive, Gobber!" He took one look at the airship, and then burst out laughing.

"That slippery bastard! I should 'a known! Captain of the S.S. Artemis! Now there's a fine sight!" He laughed once more for good measure. "Stand down the alert! Berk is safe today. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an old friend to go and meet." Hiccup smiled, and turned to leave when Gobber grabbed him and dragged him along. "You too, Hiccup. I believe it's time yer met yer uncle Traask. Valka?"

"I'll go get him." She laughed, climbing back onto Cloudjumper's shoulders. "Oh, and Hiccup?"

"Yes, mom?"

"You might well be in for a pleasant surprise. Or, more to the point, Toothless might be." She winked at him, as if they were in on some big secret, which was only half-true of course. Hiccup gave his mother a confused look, before replacing his flight helmet, climbing aboard Toothless and taking off into the sky after Valka, Gobber not far behind him.

* * *

><p>Aboard the Artemis, Traask had made his way down to the hangar bay. Although he didn't wear a flight suit, every part of Traask's appearance was custom tailored for dragonback flight. His shirt was made from spiders silk, painstakingly collected and woven by master seamstresses from the Far East. The leather trousers and overcoat he wore were treated to be fireproof. He wore a pair of custom made

flight goggles; one had a telescopic zoom he could operate with his facial movements, and the other was rigged up with various targeting optics, including an infrared lens that could detect body heat at night. His boots were leather bound in ultra-light steel. A ten pound hammer couldn't put a dent in them.<p>

The colour of his attire was matte black, which could be considered just an unnecessary level of extravagance on his part, but in fact it was really quite suitable. For Traask's dragon was a Night Fury called Astragard, a name that struck fear into the hearts of men from the fjords of Norway to the jungles of Indonesia. Traask and Astragard were so powerful that it was rumoured that they had the blood of the gods in their veins. As far as Traask was concerned, he saw no reason not to let the myth perpetuate.

Traask entered the hangar and spoke to his hangar marshal, Quinn Krayst.

"Is she ready, Quinn?" His accent was still recognisable as originating from the Norse tribes, but it was clipped, measured, as if he was trying not to waste his voice on idle words that were unnecessary. Here was a man who was clearly a superior intellect, and in this world, intelligence was more lethal a weapon than even dragonfire.

"All ready and geared up, Captain," Krayst responded, his voice somewhere between the Urals and Eastern Europe. "I even managed to repair your favourite saddle in time."

"Excellent work, as always, lieutenant. Open the bay doors."

"Yes, sir. Open the doors!" The doors to the hangar were set in the back of the airship, and on Quinn's command, two of the crew began to wind a pair of pulleys, sliding the cast iron doors open with thick chains.

Traask stroked Astragard under the jaw, eliciting a contented purr from the dragon, before climbing into the saddle. As soon as the doors opened wide enough, he spurred Astragard into flight and they took off out of the airship. They fell for half a second until Astragard flared her wings, swooping about and back towards Cloudjumper and Valka.

* * *

><p>"So, mom," Hiccup asked over the wind that blew past them. "Why am I about to be pleasantly surprised?"<p>

"You'll see." She smiled, deliberately being cryptic.

"You never know," Gobber smirked. "Astrid could be about to give you a show, _if _you catch my driftâ€!"

"GOBBER!" They both shouted at him, somewhere between disgust and hilarity, as Gobber just cackled madly.

"The other thing it could be of course - "

"Gobber, you're next suggestion had better not involve Ruffnut in any way!" Hiccup threatened him.

"Actually, I was going to suggest it be more of a show for Toothless." Gobber pointed towards something coming from the direction of the airship, and as Hiccup's gaze drifted towards it, he almost literally fell out of the sky.

"Is â€“ Is that - "

"Yes, Hiccup." Valka smiled, almost tearing up at the sight. "It's another Night Fury!"

At this, Toothless' ears pricked up, and when he saw Astragard, he whooped with joy and set off a fireball, before literally flying a loop the loop out of excitement.

"Waaah!" Hiccup cried, after he was nearly thrown off. "Ok, ok, I get it you're excited! Believe me, you're not the only one!" Valka laughed at the antics of her son and his dragon, herself excited at the prospect of more Night Furies. In all her time as a dragon rider, Toothless and Astragard were the only two she had ever seen. She just hoped that they were a good match, or she would have scared Gobber half to death for nothing.

That thought sobered her a little, as she realised that if Toothless and Astragard didn't mate, and produce a clutch together, they may well be the very last of their kind.

And if that happened, then she would have failed, and her greatest nemesis, the monster who had tried to stamp them out in the first place, would have finally beaten her.

* * *

><p>As an aspiring zoologist, I feel compelled to do all I can to save our favourite dragons from the threat of extinction. No animal should have to suffer such an indignity, especially not a sapient creature like Toothless. If we cannot save our most endangered species in the real world, we can at least afford the dragons of Berk the respect of saving them from such damnation.

4. Paradise Lost

**Greetings to you all, dear readers. Sorry this took a while to put together; a rather busy few days combined with mild writer's block meant very slow progress on it. Thanks as always to my loyal reviewers: Backlash 42, madeline . kallis, GwuncanGirl0203 and Remedy's Melody 109. Your reviews mean a lot to me, especially when they offer advice and criticisms. **

Thought of the Day: It occurred to me upon reviewing this chapter that, despite being the longest I've written thus far, it portrays the shortest amount of time in the story. Very strange. Either I'm getting better at this writerings mellarkey, or the space-time continuum has gone and thrown a wobbly again.

**DISCLAIMER: I am very sad to inform you all that I do not own the HTTYD franchise and any an all characters, places and themes relating to it. Now I must go and eat some more cake before I start feeling

down again. Enjoy!**

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><p>Paradise Lost

After Valka had stopped Hiccup's strike team from destroying the Artemis, Hiccup ordered the others back to the ground, and the six of them â€“ Hiccup, Valka, Gobber, Toothless, Cloudjumper and Grumple â€“ landed outside Hiccup's house. As Hiccup dismounted, he couldn't help but feel some slight trepidation â€“ he was about to meet his uncle, who he never knew he had, for the first time. Said uncle was the captain of an exotic air travelling machine that defied even Hiccup's imagination, and he had his own Night Fury, a female one, no less. The chain of thought that was rushing across his mind had ejected an endless stream of possibilities.

My uncle Traask, he thought, trying it out in his head. Well, this should be interesting.

As Hiccup watched Traask dismount Astragard, he couldn't help subconsciously appraising him. He was quite obviously stronger than Hiccup, but rather than the sheer bulk that most honest Vikings liked to boast about when drunk with their friends or wooing women, Traask possessed the wiry strength that came from many years of flying dragonback. The way he almost walked off his dragon, as opposed to Hiccup's usual stumble (**Hiccup to author: HEY! I do have a prosthetic leg, you know? Author to Hiccup: Sorry, I'm just trying to make a point!**), demonstrated the liteness of his body, the absolute precision with which he carried himself.

As he took off his flight goggles, which Hiccup made a mental note to examine at the earliest opportunity, Hiccup noticed that his eyes were different colours â€“ while his left eye was the same shade of green that Valka and Hiccup shared, his right eye was a deep brown colour. His hair was similar to Hiccup's, or would be if Hiccup actually bothered to drag a comb through it once in a while. Whereas Hiccup had a mop of unruly locks, the only attempts to control it being the braids that Astrid liked to put in, Traask had given his hair a very neat and precise look. He had combed the back of his hair into a short ponytail, similar to the one Eret bore, though a couple of inches longer, and his fringe was neatly combed back to the top of his skull.

His face, however was what gathered Hiccup's attention the most. Traask's lips were set in a somewhat stern expression, and his jawline was so sharp it could cut through steel. The look was finished off by a thin, white scar that ran from his left temple to his right cheek. His stern look was offset, however, by the deep laugh lines around his lips and eyes, and the button nose that he shared with Hiccup.

All in all, Hiccup saw in Traask a man that he could utterly trust, but also a man to be feared and respected. The last man that did that for Hiccup was his father.

No one else had ever been afforded that honour.

* * *

><p>As Traask dismounted Astragard, who then immediately switched her focus to Toothless, he embraced his sister briefly before smiling and greeting his old friend, Gobber.</p>

"Gobber the Belch!" He laughed. "Still going strong, my old friend."

"Aye, and yer know it! Still surviving on the same old mixture of Viking grit, youthful boar-headedness and sheer dumb bloody luck."

"And that secret bottle of scotch that you keep hidden under your workbench?"

"Well, not anymore." Both men laughed heartily at this, before embracing each other, the years apart a fragile barrier against the strength of their friendship.

It was then that Traask turned to his nephew, Hiccup, and had his first chance to see what he was made of.

Most people would have described Hiccup as tall, quite gangly, very thin for a Viking, and overall not exactly the kind of person you would associate with Vikings, let alone be one himself, and especially not a chieftain. But Traask had spent his entire life as an explorer. He was accustomed to meeting new people every day, each of them radically different from him, and even more so from the people he met the day before, and those he would meet the day after. Traask had learned to read all the little things that told you what you needed to know about the true nature of an individual, all the little signs, personal ticks and mannerisms that revealed the true soul of anyone. He took in a thousand details about Hiccup in an instant, and what he saw left him almost awestruck.

Here, before him, stood a man who had seen and been a part of two entirely different worlds – the world of Berk during their centuries' long war with the dragons, and the world of Berk with dragons as their greatest allies, the world he himself had helped to create.

Traask had only seen his nephew once, when he was but a baby. Despite that, he knew that this Hiccup was a very different man from the boy who had grown up on Berk. He was also a different man from the one Valka had described after finding him and his dragon, though that change was infinitely more subtle. It was a very recent change, or else he would never have noticed it, and he couldn't quite place it. But, all in all, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III was not just a man, or a dragon rider, or a chieftain or any of the things he might claim to be.

What Traask saw in Hiccup was the soul of a visionary. Here was a man who would lead not just his people but all of mankind into a future so glorious that whatever civilisation was borne of this man's spirit would survive until the end of time.

And this man was his nephew. Go figure.

Traask walked over to Hiccup, and placed his hands gently on his nephew's shoulders. As the young chief looked up into the eyes of his uncle, Traask saw a flicker of curiosity, mellowed with the forgiving

and peaceful nature of his psyche; but, below that, was a streak of confidence, one that he had fostered in order to be the leader he was expected to be. Hiccup may have given him a look that greeted him amicably, but he was subconsciously transmitting his authority "as he should do.

Traask looked into those eyes, the same green that his sisters were, and smiled gently.

"Hiccup," he spoke so softly he might as well have whispered it. "I never thought I'd see you become the man standing before me."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Hiccup asked.

"I have met many people in my time." Traask continued in the same soft voice. "I have learned to read the souls of men like pages in a book. Yours is perhaps the kindest, most loving and most interesting I have seen in quite a while."

"Thanks," Hiccup smiled bashfully.

"It is also perhaps the most powerful I have ever seen. It is obvious to me now why you are chieftain. Your father may have had the strength to fight off hordes of dragons and protect all those he loved from them. But you, you have a strength all of your own. Not the courage to fight off armies, or strike down armadas. You are the only person I have ever met who is strong enough to wage peace as much as most men wage war. You have the heart of a great leader, and the soul of a visionary, one who looked at the world and decided that it wasn't good enough." Traask looked down for a moment, and when he looked back at Hiccup, his eyes were shining. "You have a heart of true courage, one of pure and unadulterated love."

"Love?"

"Yes, Hiccup," Traask smiled. "To find it in your heart to save what was your greatest enemy, that is true courage. True courage is not knowing when to take a life, but when to spare one." Traask looked at Toothless and Astragard, and when Hiccup followed his gaze, he finally understood. "Only a full heart has the room to accept more. I don't know what I did in my life to earn the honour of meeting you, but I am glad I did it."

Traask embraced his nephew, who embraced him back with equal vigour. Hiccup wasn't entirely sure what his uncle had just told him, but it had stirred something inside him that made him trust his uncle explicitly, even though they had just met. He looked at his mother, who was almost overcome with emotion at their reunion, and he knew then that Traask was just as much his family as anyone, and everyone, was.

* * *

><p>As Traask and Hiccup met for what was, practically speaking, the first time, Toothless also met someone new for the first time "Astragard. For the first time in his life, he now knew that he was not alone.</p>

While he had been ecstatic when he had first seen Astragard in the

sky, now he was almost nervous. He approached her, as she approached him, and then they spoke. Not in any vocal language that a human would understand, but one that relied on thousands of discrete signals — little flicks of their ears, distinct growls or moans in sequence, and even certain scents that only other dragons could detect and interpret.

_Greetings, friend. _Toothless welcomed her. _My eyrie, and the skies above it, are yours as much as mine._

_Great thanks, friend. _Astragard answered, her head bowed in gratitude. _I welcome the comforts of your eyrie as my own._ Toothless slowly circled her, sniffing gently, his eyes scouring every inch of the other dragon, taking the measure of her. Astragard was rather amused at the response.

_You seem very curious about me. Have you not seen another Night Fury before now? _She chuckled deep in her throat.

Well, um, no. Toothless responded despondently. Astragard looked at him with shock, and then sorrow in her eyes.

You mean, you have never seen another of your kind? Toothless shook his head, emitting a sad warble as he did. _How have you managed to live like this for so long?_

Ever since I hatched, I was in service to a false alpha, Toothless explained, using the dragons term for the Red Death that had enslaved them. _I had no time to think of my isolation. The only time I ever thought about it was whenâ€|_

_When what? _Astragard urged him. In response, Toothless lifted his tail, showing her his prosthetic fin.

When this happened, he explained. Astragard sniffed at his tail, examining it.

I was shot down during a raid, and landed in a forest. I was imprisoned by the device that hit me. I couldn't move or fly. I thought that I would die there, alone and forgotten.

_What saved you? _Toothless smiled, and looked at Hiccup.

He did.

A human? Toothless nodded.

Yes. He was the one who shot me down. Astragard gave him a quizzical look. _At first, he intended to kill me. He brought out his knife, as they call those false claws of theirs, and was about to plunge it into me, beforeâ€| before something stopped him. _Toothless looked at Hiccup, as if still trying to understand his actions that day. _He turned away, as if he felt guilty. Then, the next thing I knew, he was cutting me loose. The moment I was free, I pounced him. I would have killed him there and then, butâ€|_

_What? _Astragard asked him, softly. _What stopped you? _He sagged his shoulders, his eyes closed in thought. Astragard saw him shed a single tear.

I couldn't kill him, because he was as terrified as I had been. I looked at him, and saw myself. He spared me, even though he was scared of me. How could I not do the same?

Astragard leaned forward and licked the tear off his cheek. That was very brave of you. I'm not sure I would have had the same self-control.

Toothless smiled in a bashful sort of way. Other than from Stormfly, he wasn't used to getting compliments from female dragons.

Thank you. He nuzzled her nose softly, a symbol of friendly affection amongst dragons. What do they call you?

My name is Astragard.

That's a beautiful name, Astragard. She blushed slightly at the compliment.

And what do they call you? Now it was his turn to blush.

They call me! Toothless.

Toothless?! Astragard gave him a look of disbelief.

Yeah, my rider once made a comment about the retractable teeth, and it, sort of stuck. He looked over to see Astragard trying not to laugh.

What? He asked indignantly.

Nothing, it's just!

Yeah, yeah, laugh it up. Toothless pouted. Astragard laughed at his expression, before nuzzling him under the chin, an action that was usually considered a little more than just a friendly gesture.

I think it's a handsome name, for a handsome dragon. Toothless looked at her with wide eyes, his face held slightly aloft.

Handsome? You really think so?

Wow, you really don't fly with fire much, do you? She asked, using a dragonese expression for 'playing the field', as it were.

To be fair, you are the only other Night Fury I've ever met.

Well, in that case, you have some practising to do. Astragard said in what would have been a rather sultry voice, before rubbing the top of her head against his cheek and growling in her throat, the unmistakable sign of romantic interest between dragons. Toothless, barely believing his luck, reciprocated with the same action.

Yes, indeed. He answered back. And I intend to get all the practise I can.

Astragard giggled quietly, blushing furiously, secretly glad that humans, and most dragons, couldn't interpret the facial expressions

of Night Furies.

I look forward to it.

* * *

><p>Unfortunately for Astragard, the humans currently gathered around them were far more adept at reading dragon expressions than most, especially those of Night Furies, and effectively followed the entire discourse between them. Gobber and Traask chuckled under their breath, comparing them subconsciously to the many romantic situations they had witnessed (and partaken in) in their youth. But Valka and Hiccup could only smile with joy. Despite everything that had happened, they had succeeded. They had found another Night Fury, a female one no less, and she and Toothless had clearly bonded together. Whilst Traask and Gobber saw a new couple that they could tease endlessly, Hiccup saw a new future, one much brighter, and with hopefully a whole clutch of Night Fury fledglings in it.</p>

"Well, now there's a sight I'd thought I'd never see." Traask laughed. "Reminds me of the way you and Stoick acted when you were courting, sis." They both laughed at that, as Traask put his arm around his sister, his affection for his sister obvious to all. "Speaking of which, where is the old bastard anyway? I still have that barrel of mead he gave me last time I was here, thought I might share it." He looked around and saw that their faces had all become despondent, especially Toothless'. He realised then that something was very wrong. "Valka, what's happened? What happened to him?"

She looked at him, her eyes brimming with tears, before she broke down in his arms. He held her to his chest, comforting her as only he knew how, realising now that Stoick, her darling husband, the almighty warrior chieftain of Berk, had somehow, unbelievably, died.

Gobber put a hand on Traask's shoulder. "Yer may want to come with me, old friend."

He looked at Gobber, his own tears forming. Now he knew what that subtle change in Hiccup was. "I think I had better, hadn't I?"

5. Honour Amongst Thieves

Hello, my dear readers. Welcome to chapter five, where we explore the mysteries of time, the nature of romance and, of course, Eret, for reasons that shall be explained. Thanks again to my loyal reviewers, Backlash 42, GwuncanGirl0203, madeline . kallis, Remedy's Melody 109, CherryPika91 and Aniwolfgirl. Virtual cookies for you all! In this chapter, I attempted for the first time to incorporate a song into a story. Virtual prizes will be given to those who know what it is! Enjoy!

DISCLAIMER: I do not, never have, and unfortunately likely never will own the HTTYD franchise and any and all of it's characters and component parts.

* * *

><p>Honour Amongst Thieves, and Friends at the Long

Table

Gobber led Traask to the site where they had erected an obelisk as a memorial to Stoick, some distance from the village, overlooking the ocean. The structure was nothing more than a shard of obsidian coloured rock, some twelve feet high, but the shard itself wasn't the only thing that marked his passing.

All around the obelisk, the villagers had placed various items; helmets, weapons, flags and banners, things that held some meaning to both them and to Stoick.

Traask saw, through tear-blurred eyes, that there were words carved into the rock:

Here We, the Vikings of Berk

Remember our Great Leader

Stoick the Vast

A Warrior,

Chieftain,

Father & Friend

May the Valkyries Sing his Name in Songs of Glory

So all Might know of his Passing

As Traask reached the obelisk, he kneeled down before it, not in prayer or respect, but because he could not find the strength to stand. He looked down and saw something that he recognised: it was a drawing of Stoick and Valka, on their wedding day – a drawing Traask himself had made. As he picked it up, he saw that someone had written a few words in the corner:

I can only hope I will be half the chief you ever were. I'm only sorry you never got to see me become that man. Goodbye, Dad. We will always love you.

Traask recognised something of his nephew in the scrawled handwriting, and realised that Hiccup had written these words. He placed the drawing back where he had found it, and let a single tear fall from his left eye.

"Stoick, why?" He whispered. Then he threw back his head and uttered a cry of despair and sorrow, a cry so anguished that Gobber felt his blood go cold. When his voice gave out, he collapsed onto Gobber, who had knelt next to him, the tears finally being set free. As Traask was racked by his anguish, all Gobber could do was put an arm around his old friend, offering him what little comfort he could, as he himself shed a tear for his chief, his brother-in-arms. His best friend.

* * *

><p>Whilst Gobber had led Traask to the memorial site, Valka and Cloudjumper had gone flying, to be alone with their thoughts, and

Hiccup had flown with Toothless to the cove on Raven's Point where they had first met. He had found that it was a good place to help him gather and focus his thoughts.<p>

Hiccup was sat on the large rock near the centre of the clearing, watching the sun go down through a gap in the trees. Toothless was curled up nearby, napping in the dying sunlight. In that place, time stood still for them. For whilst they had changed over the years, the cove had not changed at all since they first came here five years ago. Even the drawings they had made in the dirt were still there, although they were faint outlines of what they used to be. Here was a place where they could reflect on the past, and look forward into the future.

Just as the sun was descending below the horizon, Hiccup heard the unmistakable cry of a Nadder overhead, and smiled as he realised who it could only be " Astrid and Stormfly.

Hiccup stood as they landed, and saw Astrid jump off Stormfly, who stalked off towards Toothless after Astrid had scratched her neck affectionately. Astrid then walked over to Hiccup, her hands behind her back, swinging her body ever so slightly with each step, and wearing that smile that Hiccup recognised so well. He smiled back, unable to help himself and clambered off the rock to greet his girlfriend, discretely checking the secret pocket that he had sewn into his leather jacket, which he was now wearing, along with some black leggings, his old green tunic and his most comfortable boot, in favour of his flight suit. As she approached him, he bowed slightly, causing her to giggle as he started this ritual that had sprung up between them.

"Milady," he offered his arm to Astrid, which she took with mock grace, both of them trying not to laugh.

"My lord," she answered, before curtsying just as slightly. They laughed as he stood up, before pulling her close, quickly stealing a kiss from her. As their lips locked, he placed a hand on her waist, the other taking hers, and they slowly began to dance together. Neither of them knew why they had started doing this, but they found that they enjoyed it, and did so whenever they found themselves alone. As they danced, Astrid placed her head into Hiccup's left shoulder, smiling as she listened to his heart beat ever so slightly faster, revelling in the knowledge that she was the cause of this small but distinct change.

* * *

><p>As they danced, Stormfly had bounced over to Toothless, who woke up and greeted his old friend.<p>

Hey there, Stormfly.

Hi, Toothless.

How's Typhoon?

_He went fishing earlier with Mulch and Bucket. Probably won't be back until midnight now. _She grumbled.

Hey, we all have to help out, Stormfly.

_I know, I know. _She sighed. _Sorry, I guess it's just that we haven't been together that long._

That's ok. He nudged his friend gently. _I'm sure he'll miss you too when we're gone on that egg hunt next week._

Yeah. Assuming of course that you're still coming, Tooth. She snickered quietly. Toothless raised his head up, giving her a quizzical look.

What's that supposed to mean?

Oh come on, She rolled her eyes at him. _Everyone's talking about it, Tooth._

Talking about what?

About your latest, ah, romantic developments.

Romanticâ€| oh.

_Oh, indeed! _She laughed, Toothless' face dropping in embarrassment. _Well, if you ever need someone to look after the hatchlings, you know you can count on me._

STORMFLY! We've only just met!

I know, I know. It's just that you always said that you wanted children of your own, and now, for the first time, you can.

Yeah, wellâ€|

Well what?

_It's justâ€| _Toothless laid his head over his forepaws, trying to find the words to describe his feelings. _Before it was always something that I never thought I would have. I always thought the limit of my parenting debut would be looking after someone else's hatchlings, like yours or Hookfang's. _

You would have been the best uncle in the world. They both chuckled at that.

_But now, _He sighed happily. _Now I actually have the chance to be a sire. In a single day, I went from being the last of my race, to potentially being the sire of all my kind. It's a very sudden change, is all._

That I can understand, but then sudden and earth-shattering changes seem to be your forte, don't they?

_TouchÃ©. _He laughed.

_So, _Stormfly shuffled closer to him. _What's she like, Astragard?_

_Astra? _Toothless sighed dramatically. _I could be here until this time next week describing her._

_Astra? Pet names already? _Stormfly chuckled. _Well, seeing as we don't have all week, give me the short version._

_Stormfly, she's perfect. If I lived for a thousand years, they wouldn't compare to a day with her. Iâ€œ I love her, Storm, like I've never loved anyone else. _

Well, that's good, as you never have loved anyone else.

_Storm! _Toothless growled at her. _You know what I mean!_

I'm jesting, Tooth. She chuckled. _But, seriously, we're happy for you. All of us._

_Thanks, Storm. _Toothless smiled, nudging up against her nose, an affection she returned. _That means a lot, coming from you._

They were suddenly interrupted when Astrid gave a very un-Astrid like squeal.

_Oh, gods, they're mating again, aren't they? _Toothless grumbled.

_I don't think so, _Stormfly replied, her extra height giving her a sight advantage. _Whatever it is they're doing, they seem very happy though._

Maybe it's another way of mating for their kind? Toothless suggested.

_I don't know, _Stormfly looked again. _What does it mean when a male kneels down in front of a female?_ Toothless shrugged, as clueless as Stormfly.

* * *

><p>Whilst Stormfly and Toothless were having their conversation about Toothless' love life, Hiccup and Astrid were having a somewhat similar conversation of their own. They had found their perfect dancing rhythm, and the entire world ceased to exist for them, but for the cove.<p>

"Astrid?" Hiccup said quietly.

"Yes, my love?" Astrid smiled back.

"What do you think of my singing voice?"

"Your singing voice?" She gave him a very quizzical look.

"Yeah. Just wondered what you thought of it, that's all." She thought for a moment, then realised something quite awkward.

"I don't think I've ever actually heard you sing." Astrid answered slowly.

"Well," Hiccup laughed nervously. "Would you like to?" Astrid smiled quirkily, intrigue at the strange turn the conversation had taken.

"Ok, then." She squeezed his hands to encourage him. He smiled back, and then he climbed up onto the rock next to them, cleared his throat and began to serenade her.

"_I have a dream_

You are there

High above the clouds somewhere

Rain is falling from the sky

But it never touches you

You're way up high"

Astrid beamed at her adorable boyfriend. Singing was not a skill she expected him to have, but his singing voice was actually a very good smooth baritone, one that made her skin tingle and her heart beat faster.

"_No more worries_

No more fears

You have made them disappear

Sadness tried to steal the show

But now it feels like many years ago"

He jumped down from the rock and grabbed Astrid's hands, now singing directly to her.

"_And I_

I will be with you every step

Tonight

I found a friend in you

And I'll keep you close forever"

Astrid laughed as they began dancing again, although this time it was a faster dance than usual, Hiccup still singing in that oh so sexy baritone voice of his. They were both caught up in the rhythm of the song now, and whilst Astrid had no idea what had brought this on, she was loving every second of it.

"_Come fly with me _

_Into a fantasy _

Where you can be

Whoever you want to be

Come fly with me"

Without knowing the words, and never having heard the song, Astrid somehow managed to join in his song, her high, clear voice contrasting his deep, slow one.

"_We can fly all day long_

Show me the world

Sing me a song

Tell me what the future holds

You and I will paint it all in gold!"

Hiccup smiled in relief, glad that Astrid had taken the bait and managed to join in herself. He was still nervous about the next part, but then that was the most important part.

"_And I_

_I will believe your every word _

_ 'Cause I_

I have a friend in you

We'll always stay together

_Come fly with me _

_Into a fantasy _

Where you can be

Whoever you want to be

Come fly with me"

Hiccup stopped dancing then, and sung quietly, as though the words were meant just for her. He moved his hand up to her face, gently stroking her cheek as she just smiled back at him.

And I

I will be with you every step

He leaned in and stole a deep kiss from her, making her giggle shyly.

"_Tonight_

I found my heart in you

And I'll keep you close forever"

He pulled her up on the large rock he had been sitting on when she landed, and discretely pulled a small box from inside his jacket as he did. Something about that box made the hair on the back of her neck stand up, but not out of fear, more out of excitement and anticipation.

"_Come fly with me_
Into a fantasy
Where you can be
Whoever you want to be
Come fly with me"{

Then he did something that Astrid did not expect. He opened the box to reveal a ring. It was made of gold and platinum intertwined, and set straight into the band were three small diamonds. It didn't occur to her what it meant until he went down on one knee in front of her. Then it clicked, and she literally squealed in excitement, bringing her hands to her mouth as her smile threatened to break free of her face entirely.

"_Come fly with me _
_Into a fantasy _
Where you can be
Whoever you want to be
Come fly with me"{

"Astrid?" He looked straight at her, his eyes a shining reflection of her own. "I think you know what I'm going to say next." Astrid laughed, wondering how Hiccup managed to make everything "even this" his own brand of awkward.

"Could you ask it anyway?"

"Of course." He looked at her with nothing but pure love in his eyes. His entire life, it seemed, had boiled down to this moment. He took a deep breath, and with all the conviction he could muster, he said, "Astrid Hofferson, would you do me, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, the greatest of all honours, and will you marry me?"

* * *

><p>Gobber had left Traask at the memorial, partly because he was sure that his friend needed the time alone, and partly because he had a million and one things to do at the forge. When he returned, he had noticed the conspicuous absence of the ring that Hiccup had forged to propose to Astrid with, and smiled to himself. Today of all days they needed something to cheer them up.<p>

He was still trying to identify that metal that Drago had used, and so far had only figured out that it was a mixture of materials, when Traask walked into the forge, his eyes red and bleary. Gobber walked over to him and pulled him into an embrace that Traask reciprocated.

"Yer a'right?"

"I'm fine, thanks, Gobber."

"I'm sorry yer had to find out like that."

"Ah, I had to find out sometime." Traask pulled away from his friend and smiled at him to show he was alright. "I'm only sorry I couldn't have been here for Valka."

"Not a one of us saw it comin', Traask. It woulda' taken a great twist o' fate fer yer to be there." Gobber reassured him, before dousing the forge for the night, giving up on the strange metal for the night. "Now, if I recall, you mentioned sommat about a cask o' meadâ€|" He let the sentence hang, Traask smiling at his old friend.

"I see you still don't miss a trick when it comes to the alcohol, old friend."

"And don't yer know it!" He laughed heartily, slapping Traask on the back as they went to retrieve said cask.

* * *

><p>Now, the universe, according to the Tempus Est Incommutabilis theory, has a very strange way of dealing with changes in time. Quite simply, time is immutable, but everything else is subject to change. So, if one were to attempt to assassinate someone in the past, they would never be able to succeed; the gun would jam, or the target would move, or someone else might take the shot or even eliminate the shooter. Or, even worse, you might succeed, but then the universe will spit out someone even worse to replace them. Unfortunately for our dear dragon riders, this doomsday scenario has, in fact, played out, but that part isn't important until later. What's important right now are two consequences of this scenario, one completely insignificant, and the other so important that the continuation of the entire human race depends on it. But, to retain the element of surprise, it shall not be revealed which is which. For you see, the first consequence is that Eret, Son of Eret, our beloved ex-dragon trapper turned dragon rider, was the original first officer aboard the S.S. Artemis, and the second is that had Drago Bludfist followed his preset destiny to become the Artemis' first officer instead, he would have killed Traask during his attempted mutiny. Only the appearance of a very secretive individual at precisely the right (or wrong) time and place ensured that Eret replaced Drago. A very secretive individual who has just made their way to the island of Berkâ€|<p>

* * *

><p>As Traask and Gobber turned around the corner into the main square, laughing at old memories of their youthful escapades, Traask just happened to look across the square â€“ and straight into the eyes of his old first officer.<p>

"Wait a minute. Gobber is that who I think it is?"

"Why that's our dear friend - "

"ERET!" Traask bellowed across the courtyard, his arms wide in greeting for his old friend.

"Traask Faetherson!" Eret laughed jovially. "So you are still alive, you slippery bastard!" The two men greeted each other with a firm handshake and much laughing.

"Gobber, you sneaky dog, you never told me that Eret, Son of Eret, was here!"

"I didn't know yer knew each other." Gobber replied.

"Eret here," Traask slapped him on the shoulder. "Was my first officer. He is also the reason that the Artemis is no longer in the hands of Drago Bludfist."

"Oh? Now there's a story I need to hear!"

"Well, it's not much of one to tell." Eret said. "Quite simply, we stole her." They both laughed at the memory, before Traask suggested that Eret join them in their mead drinking expedition. The three men were just about to head to the airship when they heard a commotion down the street. They turned to see a good portion of the village crowded together, holding Hiccup and Astrid aloft, who seemed to be doing their best to hold hands, as if they were tied together.

"What the hell's that all about?" Traask asked. Whilst Eret just shrugged his shoulders, Gobber began laughing like a maniac, causing them both to stare oddly at him.

"Gobber, is there something we should know?" Eret asked.

"Why don't you go and find out? I'll meet you on the airship." He answered cryptically, still laughing as he limped off towards the Artemis. Traask and Eret looked at each other, shrugged and decided to follow Gobber's advice.

As they walked towards the commotion, Valka ran towards the pair, a smile etched into her face.

"Sister, dear!" He had to almost shout over the crowd. "You wouldn't be able to shed any light on all this?"

"Of course I can!" She threw her arms around him, before looking straight at him and saying, "Your darling nephew has just got engaged!"

6. Rites of Passage

Bonjour, mes amis! And so we arrive at chapter 6, where we see the aftermath of the announcement of our favourite Viking chiefs engagement, copious amounts of love (and lovemaking), a little bit of Berk's history, dragon courtship rituals, hope for the future and mysterious forces, moving in the darkness for reasons unknown!

**Many thanks, as always, to my loyal and wonderful reviewers, Backlash 42, madeline . kallis, GwuncanGirl0203, Remedy's Melody 109, CherryPika91 and Aniwolfgirl, and a special shoutout to Aniwolfgirl for correctly guessing the song in the last chapter, which was of course Into a Fantasy by Alexander Rybak, written specially for How to Train Your Dragon 2! I think you'll find in this chapter that

Toothless is about to get all the luck he deserves, Aniwolfgirl!
Enjoy!**

DISCLAIMER: I do not own the HTTYD franchise, any of it's characters or other elements, and sadly I also do not own any dragons. Ah, well. (Sob)

* * *

><p>Rites of Passage

At the news of the (admittedly inevitable) engagement of Hiccup and Astrid, the whole village stopped doing whatever it was they were doing and used the announcement as an excuse to celebrate, get absolutely hammered and have a series of friendly competitions, which eventually devolved into one big, not so friendly competition, which was basically a macho game of one-upmanship involving some very drunk Vikings and copious amounts of dragonfire. Many toasts were made to the couple, most led by Valka and Traask, and Gobber even turned up with the mead, Traask remarking on his ludicrously good ability to root out alcohol from literally anywhere. And whilst the Vikings of Berk had yet to discover the advent of fireworks, a display of fire-breathing dragons was just as breath-taking, if not more so. Despite all the excitement, Hiccup still noticed the unusually inconspicuous absence of Toothless, but a shared mischievous glance with his uncle explained that away easily enough.

At some point during the festivities, Hiccup and Astrid managed to find an excuse to leave, pleading exhaustion, which the villagers all accepted. By that point, they were all really too drunk to care, and were more interested in the aforementioned game of one-upmanship anyway, if indeed any of them were actually capable of recalling the original reason for the festivities. We're Vikings, their drink sodden minds rationalised. Do we really need an excuse to get rowdy and pissed? Or should that be pissed and then rowdy?

After extricating themselves from the crowd, Astrid and Hiccup headed back to his place, hand in hand, heads together and generating a wave of ecstatic and infectious joy so potent it was a miracle that they didn't trigger the early arrival of Snoggletog right there and then. They made it back to the house, bumping into a few stragglers on the way, who all offered their heartiest congratulations. But they would have to be as drunk as they were not to see the sharpness of the happy couples' eyes, and the mischief they betrayed, to believe that they were genuinely tired.

As soon as the front door was shut, Hiccup locked his lips with Astrid's, pushing her up against the door, and using his free hand to discretely slide the bolts in place. She answered his kiss with equal vigour, her arms wound tight around his neck and shoulders, her legs locked together around his waist. He slid his tongue across her lips, and she granted him access, only for a furious battle for dominance to take place, a battle which Hiccup won.

He picked her up, her limbs still wrapped around his body, and, their lips still locked together, carried her upstairs to their bedroom. When he reached the bed, he gently lowered her onto the bed, smoothly pulling her studded skirt off with one hand as he stood up. Astrid laughed mischievously at her boyfr- no, fiancÃ©'s sexual hunger.

"Eager much, my love?" She giggled at him in a sultry voice, her eyes half hooded, subconsciously jutting her chest out ever so slightly. He smiled back at her, crawling over her on the bed.

"Why, are you afraid I might ravage your body, purge you of your maiden honour and generally embarrass you by desecrating our engagement with a passionate, heat of the moment fucking before our wedding day?" He murmured in response, equally as mischievous.

"Well, I wouldn't say afraid, exactly," She leaned forward and kissed him deeply. "More hoping, really. And besides, it's not like it's going to be disappointing." He laughed, before kissing her back, no longer in a frenzied, desperate manner, but lovingly, each sharing the taste of the other. The kiss gradually grew more heated, and with a few deft, well-practised movements, they found themselves devoid of their clothing.

Hiccup gave Astrid a challenging look, which she answered with a sultry smile, closing her eyes and leaning her head back, gasping in pleasure as Hiccup introduced his, ahem, other dragon into her aching, desperate core, already wet and ready for the sexual experience of a lifetime. She gasped as he slowly entered her, deliberately taking his time, knowing that it would elongate the pleasure and tease her mercilessly. He stopped when he had finally sheathed his entire length inside her, somewhat amazed that her lithe, petite body could contain it all, if he did think so himself.

Hiccup leaned forward and kissed her again, before just as slowly drawing back, starting a slow and steady passionate rhythm that soon had her moaning and howling beneath him. Whilst Astrid was so very easy to please in that department, Hiccup had more staying power than the average dragon, let alone the average Viking, so even though he eventually adopted a $\frac{1}{4}$ rhythm, which had her nether regions utterly soaked and Astrid screaming at the top of her lungs, he could keep it up â€“ in every sense of the word â€“ for hours at a time.

It was sometime just before dawn, their bodies laced with sweat, Astrid's nether regions utterly soaked from the countless number of orgasms that the actions of Little Hiccup had caused, when he finally felt the tension that meant he would soon be done, and as he slammed into her the final few times, he achieved the satisfaction of bringing them to orgasm together, her ecstatic screams coloured with his baritone growls as he pumped his seed deep into her body. Hiccup, utterly spent after such an intense lovemaking session, collapsed next to his fiancÃ©e, panting as heavily as she was, before putting an arm around her and pulling her close to him, the first rays of dawn hitting his face as they finally dozed off, their faces adorned with the beatific looks that accompanied the very best of sexual satisfaction.

"Astrid?" Hiccup mumbled.

"Yes, Hiccup?" She whispered back.

"I love you."

"I love you too." He kissed her forehead, as she snuggled into the

crook of his shoulder, sleep finally finding them, as the sun gently rose on the happiest couple in the world.

* * *

><p>Hiccup woke up sometime around midday. He yawned loudly, stretching as he did so, and looked down to see Astrid still deep asleep. Hiccup had always found Astrid adorable when she was asleep, not that he would ever say that to her face; she would always have this small smile, and her breath would come and go in short puffs through her lips. He smiled at the sight of his dearest love asleep, and his smile grew when he saw that she was still wearing the ring he had given her.<p>

He kissed her lightly on the forehead, before gently getting out of bed so as not to wake her. As he was choosing what to get dressed in, he saw a basket in the corner that he hadn't noticed before, with a scrap of parchment laid on top of it. He picked up the note and saw it was from Gothi, of all people:

Dear Hiccup,

_Long ago, before our war with the dragons became too intense for anything else to take priority, the chieftains of Berk always observed a strict set of traditions. Amongst these was a particular dress code. Although the old uniforms were destroyed many years ago, I have, with the help of your mother, made this for you. I thought that you might appreciate a glimpse of the history of the tribe you now lead. _

_Although these items reflect the traditional dress of the old chieftains, I took the liberty of adding a few touches that reflect the changes that have happened to Berk in recent years. _

_Your changes, Hiccup. _

Your legacy.

Gothi

Hiccup was understandably intrigued by the note, and took the basket downstairs, so as not to wake Astrid while he changed. He sat on a stool to open the basket. On top of the pile was a deep green tunic that he surmised was made for comfort more than anything, being made from soft dyed wool. After that was a pair of leather leggings, based, he suspected, off his flight suit, but these weren't the rough leather chaps that he had made. His were designed to be tough wearing and sturdy, able to survive the rigours of dragonback flight. Although these would be just as strong, much more care had been put into the design. Patterns that reflected the symbols of the dragon classes had been sewn down the sides in a continuous silver-thread pattern, and the leather had been coloured to be the same charcoal colour as Toothless' underbelly. The leather overcoat that followed had the same level of attention put into it, but was remarkably different â€“ this piece was purely ceremonial. On the back, the symbol that represented the Dragon Academy â€“ and subsequently Berk â€“ was stitched in interwoven gold and silver thread, which shimmered in the light, as though they weren't threads, but the molten metals they were meant to represent. The leather had been dyed royal purple, and it even had a red velvet interior. But the last

item was what took Hiccup's breath away. He pulled free a smooth silk cloak, with the interior fur-lined for warmth, black as night, trimmed with silver thread, and held fast by a pair of solid gold round buckles with the Academy symbol engraved into them. Though Gothi's note had said that she and his mother had worked on these, he recognised some of Gobber's skill in the buckles.

In a few moments, had had dressed himself in his new uniform, vowing to himself that this would be the look that all the subsequent chiefs of Berk would be honoured to wear, and after grabbing a crust to eat, stepped out into the cold autumn sun. The wind was brisk off the ocean that day, and his new cloak billowed out behind him, giving him the striking profile of a dragon in flight.

As he slowly ate his late breakfast, surveying the village below him, he saw Toothless walk up the street towards him, making Hiccup smile.

"Hey, buddy." He scratched Toothless under the chin as he approached. "What's that you've got there?" Toothless deposited something on the ground in front of Hiccup, and took a moment for Hiccup to realise what it was — it was the tail he had made for him that allowed Toothless to fly on his own.

"Toothless?" He gave the dragon a quizzical look, only to be answered with the wide-eyed, pleading face he had given him when Toothless had rejected said tail all those years ago. "What have you dragged this out for? I thought you preferred your original tail?" Toothless warbled shyly, before pointedly looking behind him. Hiccup followed his gaze to see Astragard, of all people.

"Oh, it's Astragard. Why would you want your mechanised tail for Astra —" And then it hit him. For the first time since they'd met, Toothless had found someone that meant as much to him as Hiccup — and in this case, probably a bit more.

"Oh, I see. You need your tail to fly with her. Alone with her." Toothless chirped at his rider's understanding, and Hiccup just smiled at him in an odd sort of way, for while he was happy that his best friend had finally fallen in love with someone who could effectively reciprocate those feelings, he was also a little sad, because this meant the end of their previous friendship. Although they would undoubtedly remain as close as they were now forever, Toothless had someone else important in his life. Hiccup had never had to share his dragon's attention with anyone or anything before — he supposed it was something he would have to get used to.

He chuckled, and then went about removing the old tail unit, and replacing it with the new one. Once he had done that, Toothless tested it by fanning both of his tail fins in perfect unison. Satisfied that they still worked, Toothless nuzzled his nose into Hiccup's chest, feeling no less affection for his rider than before.

"Hey, Toothless?" Hiccup said, getting Toothless' attention. "You know that I'm happy for you, don't you? I know this means you're moving on, but I'll still be here for you, whenever you need me." Toothless warbled his understanding. "Just you remember, though, this chief still needs his dragon." Toothless nudged him again, causing Hiccup to laugh, before he shared one last look of affection with his

rider.

In that one instant, everything that had ever been left unspoken between them was laid bare or forgotten, the last five years of their lives remembered with fondness. And when Toothless turned away to see Astragard, Hiccup knew that they had both been changed by it, in some fundamental way. Their old lives, their youthful lives, were now over. They had both matured, him with his engagement to Astrid, and Toothless with his bonding to Astragard. They were no longer the adventurous teenagers that had found mutual curiosity in each other, and eventually reliance on each other just to live their daily lives. Now, in that instant, they had both become men, and Hiccup knew that it was this moment, not any other before or after, that he had finally become chief. That was the day that he became the man that his father had always hoped he'd become. Hiccup shed a single tear, and in that tear were all the memories of his childhood, the good and the bad, and as he shed it, so he shed the last shards of his youth.

Today, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III became a Viking chieftain, and Toothless became a true dragon alpha. They had both ascended through their own Rites of Passage, and they would never return to this point again, even if they could.

Hiccup looked out over the people he had sworn to protect, as he often did from his point above the hill where his home looked down on them naturally. But this time, he looked at them differently. They were no longer simply the people he had grown up with, they didn't simply represent the challenges he had to face. They weren't the members of his father's tribe anymore, they were his tribe, and he was their chieftain. Only one person saw this Hiccup, a young boy, no more than ten or eleven, but he never forgot that look on his face, and many years later, when he had grandchildren of his own, he would tell them the legend of Hiccup the Dragon Master, as he came to be known, and he told them of the day that he saw Hiccup, the first day he truly became the legend that he was remembered as.

* * *

><p>Unaware of Hiccup's subtle yet magnificent transformation, Toothless had gone to greet his beloved, now finally able to join her in the skies on his own for a ritual that dragons had relied on for thousands of years â€“ the Firesky Rites. Being sapient beings, dragons didn't rely on the usual courtship rituals and challenges that lesser animals might use. When they chose their partners, they mated for life, and couldn't afford to make a mistake. Hence, the Rites, where a male hopeful would be challenged by the female they were courting in order to prove their worth. Although it was almost certain that Astragard would accept his advances, Toothless was a dragon of tradition, even if most of Berk's dragons had picked up new mannerisms from their human riders.</p>

As he approached her, they nuzzled their heads against each other affectionately, before he showed her his new tail.

See? He said. _Now I can fly on my own._

_Incredible! _Astragard stared at the device in wonder. _To think that without humanity, our entire race may be long dead by now._

Hiccup is unique. He simply said. _If we hadn't befriended each otherâ€œ| _He looked down despondently, pondering his fate had the young Viking not found him and helped him. Astragard nudged him under the chin, lifting him out of such thoughts.

_Hey, _she said. _Don't think about what might have happened. He saved your life, and you returned the favour, and now we're all the better off for it. Don't dwell on such dark thoughts, when such happiness is all around you._

You're right, Astra, as always. He smiled, licking her chin gently. _I'm so glad I had the chance to meet you._

_And I you, Tooth. _They shared an affectionate kiss, or the closest they could get to one, being yet another mannerism they had picked up from their human counterparts.

_Shall we dance in the sky, my love? _Toothless asked formally, starting the Rites.

_Let me see the strength of your fire, my warrior. _At this, she took off into the sky, Toothless following her a moment later. As he took off, he found himself having to correct his flight significantly, and realised that after many years of relying on Hiccup to fly, he now missed the extra weight on his shoulders where his best friend would have been.

How much I have changed. He thought to himself.

Eventually, they reached the top of the cloud layer, where the Rites traditionally took place, and Toothless waited for Astragard's signal to start. The Rites consisted of a fairly simple challenge; all Toothless had to do was chase her and then catch her in flight. The challenge tested both parties, for not only did it prove to her that he was worthy of her love, but it also showed him whether she was worthy of his chasing her. However, having seen Astragard in flight already, Toothless had no doubt that she would lead him on quite a merry chase.

Several metres above him, Astragard watched him level out below him, about 50 metres behind, as was usual in the Rites. She smiled, and then released a fireball, the signal that she was ready, then immediately executed a steep spinning dive. She thought that the dive would throw him from the start, and so was pleasantly surprised when she saw that he was only a few metres behind him, despite his unfamiliar prosthetic tail.

She levelled out, and sped off towards the mountains, Toothless hot on her tail fins. For several hours, they weaved in and out of the mountains, Toothless almost catching her on a number of occasions, Astragard just escaping his grasp, for whilst she wanted him to succeed, she was not about to make it easy for him. She had her pride to consider, after all. The sun was just dipping below the horizon when she tried to shake him by descending straight into a snowdrift, hoping that he would chicken out and pull up before they crashed. What she didn't know, however, was that Toothless and Hiccup's flying relationship had always been met with mixed results, and, being no stranger to crash landings, Toothless knew from experience that even if they both crashed, the snowdrift wouldn't hurt them. As they both

hurtled towards the drift, Astragard looked back and saw that Toothless was still right behind her, even as they grew ever closer to the drift. Realising that he wasn't about to pull up, she flared her wings to break away, and then Toothless caught her, wrapping his body around hers as they careened straight into the drift.

Toothless blew the drift apart with his wings, before gently pinning her down into the snow and nipping her once just at the back of her skull, the signal that he had won. As he let her get up, she turned to him and bowed her head towards him, acknowledging his victory.

I am bested, my noble warrior. She smiled at him. Now I know of your strength and courage, and the motives of your heart. I would be honoured to share my heart with you, if you would but do the same for me. He licked the end of her nose gently.

My heart has been tempered by the Firesky Rites, and is yours to love forever.

The two dragons then raised their heads and recited a long, low melody, a song that came from the very depths of their hearts, one that was heard by all the creatures of the wild. It made them stop and turn to the sound, their own hearts yearning for the love that was being declared for all to hear.

After they had sung, Toothless and Astragard nuzzled into each other's throats, growling gently as they expressed their love for each other simply by being in each other's presence. After a few moments, Astragard nipped him on his left ear, and rolled over onto her back, her wings tucked close to her side. Toothless could almost sense her desire for him, and so he responded. He stood over her, their lips locking instantly as their heads came level to each other. As they kissed, Toothless lifted his hips and positioned his now fully erect dragonhood over her entrance.

He pulled away from the kiss, silently asking her permission. She smiled at him, and licked his nose, giving him her permission. Their eyes locked together, their pupils dilated as far as they could go, his green eyes linked to her purple ones, and then he slowly pushed into her. She growled quietly, her eyelids half-closing, until he was fully inside her. In that moment, they became one heart, one mind, one love. They closed their eyes and kissed again, as he started to move in and out of her, gently at first, until the passion of the moment caught up with them. Then he lost all sense of control and went into a wild rut that had them both howling and roaring across the forest, until eventually they both shared their release, letting loose a pair of fireballs into an unfortunately placed pine tree as they came together, their love for each other finally consummated. As Toothless' member retreated back inside him, they both nuzzled each other, both ridiculously happy, before they fell asleep, Astra snuggling into Toothless' arms, letting his wings fold over them both as they slept beneath the stars, hope for the future of their species burning brighter than it had for a very long time.

* * *

><p>What neither of them could have possibly known was, as they lay there, the fire in their bellies keeping them warm, a mysterious figure was hidden nearby. They had witnessed the entire act, and beneath the deep hood of the silver cloak they wore, a smile spread

across their face, one that belied a sense of achievement, almost victory. They silently slinked away into the darkness, but not before leaving a single silver arrow behind on the snow, the light of the moon dancing across its shaft.<p>

Mystery abound, dear readers! What are the motives and intentions of this mysterious figure? (Who the fuck am I kidding, even I don't know that yet! (Laughs maniacally before banging head on table)) Read on to discover the greatest secret humanity has ever hidden...

7. The Next Generation

Greetings, lovely readers! And so we arrive at chapter 7, where Gobber solves a riddle, Toothless finds another one, more OC's, more dragons, and a somewhat inevitable revelation.

Many thanks again to my loyal reviewers, Backlash 42, madeline . kallis, GwuncanGirl0203, Remedy's Melody 109, CherryPika91 and Aniwolfgirl.

Enjoy!

DISCLAIMER: Amongst the many things I do not own, the HTTYD franchise does not belong to me, and instead belongs to Cressida Cowell and Dreamworks Animations.

The Next Generation

When Hiccup woke up the next morning, he kissed Astrid on the forehead, earning him a happy murmur and a smile, and the first thing he noticed (or didn't notice, to be precise) was the conspicuous absence of Toothless from his fire ring. Then he remembered the conversation they had had yesterday, and smiled, knowing exactly where he'd be, and with who, and what it was they were likely doing.

He then got out of bed, attached his prosthetic leg, and ambled downstairs to make breakfast for him and Astrid, totally unaware that by the end of the day, his entire life would have been turned upside down.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile, across town, Gobber had finally, with the help of Traask's chief engineer, Li Chiang, a young Oriental woman who had joined his crew when they had docked at Singapore two years ago, discovered what the mysterious metal in Drago's dragon armour was. Engineer Chiang had walked in, taken one look at the stuff, and realised immediately what it was.<p>

"This, Mr. Gobber, is charcoal steel." She had informed him, her demeanour somewhat aloof, almost arrogant. "It's made by blending iron and other metals, usually tungsten or copper, into an alloy. When the steel that forms is set, it's melted down and mixed with ground charcoal. This makes it so strong that it can resist the shock of a battering ram launched at full speed without so much as a scratch. It's also incredibly fireproof; it would take a Nadder a whole five minutes to melt through it, and even corrosive materials,

such as Changewing acid, have trouble burning through it." She placed the metal back on the workbench. "Now, if you don't mind, I have an entire engine to rebuild after your hotshot pilots burnt out the portside aft turbine again, Captain. I don't have the time to give lectures on basic metallurgy." And with that, she practically marched out of Gobber's forge, leaving Traask to apologise to his friend.

"I'm sorry about her, old friend," Traask said, with the air of a man who had repeated those words often. "She's a bitâ€| prickly at times."

"Ah, don't worry yerself." Gobber reassured him. "I've been rebuked by many a woman in my time, as you well know." They both laughed at that. "And I daresay, not many of them could have held a candle to that beauty." He winked surreptitiously, before chuckling under his breath.

"I suppose that's the core of her problem," Traask sighed, concern etched into his features. He was always concerned for the wellbeing of his crew, especially his senior staff. "Most men that meet her, and a fair few women as well, tend not to see much further than her looks. She thinks that stops people from taking her seriously. I also think that's why she joined my crew." He saw Gobber place a bent sword into the forge, and automatically moved to start pumping the bellows for him. "We were in a city called Singapore, well to the south-east of here. We had stopped off to get supplies, and my then chief engineer, a man called Jenkins, was looking for someone who had the knowledge to fix a bust engine component. He'd looked all over the city, but couldn't find a single person who knew anything about mechanical engineering." The sword now red hot, Gobber moved it over to an anvil, where Traask held it steady as Gobber hammered it back into shape. "Just as we had given up hope, this young girl, no older than sixteen at the time, walks up and claims she could fix it. Most of the local men laughed when they heard this. It seems that not everyone in the world is as liberal as we are when it comes to gender equality." Gobber grunted his blatant disapproval. He had never understood the idea of men being superior to women, not when women like Valka and Astrid walked the earth. "Truth be told, she didn't look much like any mechanic we had ever seen, either. But Jenkins was desperate at that point. The main engine was bust without the component, so he let her look at it. She took it over to a small toolbox, being guarded by her younger brother, and had the damned thing fixed inside of a minute. Needless to say, we were amazed at her. And when we asked what she wanted as payment, she asked if she could go with us, and her brother too. Well, before I could decide, Jenkins grabbed me by the shoulder and said, 'Traask, we need her.' And that was that. A week later, Jenkins was killed during an explosion, and I promoted Chiang to take his place."

"Well, if that's not the damnedest story I ever heard!" Gobber laughed. "Well, you never know who you might meet in this world, eh?"

"No, indeed." Agreed Traask, plunging the sword into a nearby water bucket, eliciting a hissing cloud of steam from it with the hot sword blade. "Oh, I meant to ask, have you seen Astragard today? I haven't seen her since yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, she'll be around." Gobber reassured him. "It's not like you need

to worry about her. I mean, she is a Night Fury!" Traask nodded his agreement, but still gave a hopeful glance at the sky, wondering if what Hiccup had told him was true. Hoping it was true.

* * *

><p>Somewhere to the east of Berk, Toothless was woken up by the sound of birdsong in the glade where they had landed. He lifted his head and blearily opened his eyes. Then he felt Astragard shift beneath him, still asleep, and smiled, the memories of last night slowly resurfacing. He couldn't remember the last time he'd felt this happy. No, actually, he could â€“ it was when Hiccup had finally woken up out of that coma.</p>

As he slowly unfurled his wings, he stirred Astragard from her sleep. She yawned loudly, before looking at him through equally bleary eyes, a beatific expression adorning her face.

Hey, she said.

Hey, he nudged her nose softly. _Did you enjoy last night?_

Did I ever! She laughed gently. _Well, what you lack in experience, you certainly made up for with talent and enthusiasm._ Toothless smiled, the compliment and sexual banter generating a warm, fuzzy feeling in his chest, amongst other things.

My only regret is that I can't be annoyed at Hiccup and Astrid mating now. She laughed at that. _Especially not after what we did to that poor tree._ He nuzzled her neck, causing her to growl sultrily in her throat, before rolling over and standing on all fours. Once she had followed suit, they prepared to take off in search of breakfast, but something glinting in the snow caught Toothless' eye. He padded over, and saw the arrow left by the strange figure.

What's that? Astragard asked him, having followed him over.

_It's an arrow, but not like one I've ever seen before. _He considered the arrow for a moment, seemingly deliberating some action or another. _We'll take it back with us. One of the humans should know something more about it._ And with that, Toothless picked up the arrow in his mouth and they flew back towards Berk.

* * *

><p>Today was a special day for Hiccup, for several reasons. There was also one very particular reason that would make today incredibly special, but he wasn't to know that yet. The reasons for specialness that he did know about were these: firstly, he was about to accept the next generation of dragon riders into the academy; secondly, he was going to show off the academy to his mother for the first time; and thirdly, he largely suspected that Toothless would turn up a very happy dragon today.</p>

With those thoughts foremost in his mind, he strolled down to the arena, wearing his chief's outfit. As he entered the arena, he saw Valka and Cloudjumper already there, Cloudjumper sat to the side in his usual calm demeanour, lifting his head only to acknowledge Hiccup's arrival, and Valka looking around the arena, lost in wonder

at all that had changed since she had left Berk all those years ago. Hiccup smiled to himself; he hadn't seen her this happy since his father had died.

"So," he called out, slightly startling her. "What do you think of the Berk Dragon Academy?"

"This is amazing!" She laughed. "To think, that were we used to slaughter dragons, now we learn to become one with them." She turned to hug her son, who responded just as warmly. "And all thanks to you. My son." She looked at him with tears of pride forming in her eyes, stroking his cheek gently with her hand. "I don't think I'll ever be able to tell you how proud I am of you, Hiccup. You are, undoubtedly, the greatest chief Berk has ever had." Hiccup smiled, a mixture of pride and emotion forming on his face, before hugging her tightly again.

"Thanks mom," He whispered, his voice taught with emotion. "That means a lot to me."

"I know, Hiccup," Valka said softly, before noticing the arrival of the new students and smiling. "Anyway, I think you have something else that demands your attention." Hiccup turned to see the new arrivals, and immediately he was all business, his face set with his most commanding expression. He had rather hoped that Toothless would have turned up to help, but fortunately he didn't need him today. Today he wouldn't be teaching them anything, *per se*, but rather he would be helping the new students choose their dragons.

As he approached, he noticed that the students, most of them about 14-15 years old, seemed somewhat nervous in his presence, almost awed. Although he had rather expected this reaction, and had specifically worn his new ceremonial dress to enforce the idea, it was still something he wasn't used to – the idea that he was chief, that others looked up to him, even aspired towards him, was totally alien to Hiccup. He still remembered a time when he was called Hiccup the Useless (and quite a few less polite names when he wasn't in earshot). And even when he had ended the Dragon War, founded the academy and become Berk's 'Dragon Master' as Astrid sometimes liked to call him (although sometimes not in the same context, as it were), he still considered himself to be the son of Stoick the Vast. All of his life, there was always someone that he could rely on, someone above him in the chain of command that he could seek advice and counsel from. Now, he had no one. No one but himself, and any advisors he might have. It was a truly fundamental shift, and he wasn't quite sure that he had caught up with it yet.

As he went to greet the class, he saw his mother head to the arena sidelines to sit with Cloudjumper. Hiccup smiled, knowing that she intended to watch the proceedings. As he turned to the group of young Vikings, he got his first good look at them. There were five of them altogether, two boys and three girls, and he recognised all of them; the oldest there was Magnus Hofferson, who at the age of sixteen was Astrid's younger brother. It then hit him that this would technically make Magnus his future brother-in-law, but from what he knew of the lad, it wouldn't be an issue; he was the shrewdest member of the Hofferson family. They shared the same blonde hair and blue eyes inherent to the Hoffersons, but he kept his hair cropped short, and he had the signs of an emerging beard. Whilst Astrid had most definitely taken after her father, not called Fearless Finn Hofferson

for nothing, Magnus was a more reasonable individual. Hiccup had seen him break up many a family argument with nothing more than sharp logic and a calm demeanour. _He would make an excellent academy instructor one day._ Hiccup mentally noted, and was not surprised to see that Magnus already had the group gravitating around him. When he spoke, the others would listen to him, as though they sought his counsel for their every problem, which some of them might do. Hiccup had sometimes heard the boy referred to as Magnus, Best of Men, and found that the title suited him. Magnus would be a great help with training the group, he was sure.

The youngest there was a thirteen year old girl named Hilda Sigurdman. Her parents had died when she was very young of the pox, and she had been raised by Fishlegs' parents, with help from, of all people, Gobber, who was her paternal uncle. Standing at 5' 1'', she was the smallest of the group, and it was obvious that she was very shy. Her ginger hair had been pulled into a pair of pigtails, and beneath the smattering of freckles that she shared with Hiccup, he recognised something of himself at that age in her. _I'll have to pay special attention to her, make sure the rest of the group includes her._

The other girl was called Frigga the Ferocious, Hilda's complete opposite and, unsurprisingly, the youngest Jorgenson sibling. She and Snotlout had had a vicious, but at the same time affectionate, rivalry ever since she could hold a battleaxe. When she walked into the arena, her jet black hair tied back into a short ponytail, her expression harsh and her gaze seemingly capable of igniting a wooden post at fifty yards, she did so with a demeanour of unwavering confidence, her back held dead straight. The two short swords she had strapped to her back, and the black armour she wore over her tunic and leggings only added to the overall effect. But to Hiccup, having grown up with Snotlout, it almost seemed, forced somehow, as if she was making the extra effort. _The old Jorgenson rivalry_, he reasoned. _She's not just trying to live up to her brother, she means to outdo him. Tread with care, Haddock._

The other two were Harald Hiltaman and Greta Orladeson, and whilst they were totally unrelated to each other, they could have been mistaken for twins. Ever since they were toddlers, they had been virtually inseparable. They trained together, worked together, played together, went everywhere together, and now it seemed they would become dragon riders together. They had become the perfect shieldmates, and Hiccup knew that that would be very important when it came to choosing their dragons. _Hmm. It seems that a Zippelback would be the way to go with those two, or perhaps even a Snaptrapper. Or, maybeâ€¦_ Then he smiled, knowing the perfect choice for them.

Having surveyed his pupils, he stepped forward and cleared his throat, gathering their attention and talking to them for the first time.

"Welcome," He started in his most confident voice. Or, at least, his least wavery one. "To the Berk Dragon Academy. Before yourselves, it was my generation that learned to ride dragons here, and we, for the most part, had to make it up as we went along. Most of the time, we didn't know what we were doing, but after five years, we eventually figured it out." He could hear Valka chuckling in the corner. "And so, the honour of being the first official class to enter the academy

falls to you." He had judged that that would have a positive effect on the group. Hilda's confidence almost visibly shot up, Frigga's ego had been satisfactorily stroked, and Harald and Greta were obviously more excited. Only Magnus was unaffected by the statement, and very likely saw right through it. But then he wasn't going to be a problem. "Now, usually the first session of this kind of training regimen would be a couple of hours being lectured to about the basics of the subject, outlining the course, a few safety announcements, that sort of thingâ€|" He paused for effect whilst he watched the group visibly deflate, sharing a conspiratorial wink with his mother, who was trying not to laugh. "â€| But we, being Vikings, do things slightly differently. As my old teacher, Gobber once put it, we believe in learning on the job. So today, you, the first students of Berk Dragon Academy, are going to spend it picking out your dragons." There was a cheer from the group, and at Hiccup's direction, they all moved to the centre of the arena, where he instructed them to wait and talk amongst themselves. Whilst they were distracted, Gobber hobbled into the arena, much to Hiccup's relief, as he had asked Gobber to help with the dragon choosing today.

"Nice of you to show up." He mock chastised his old friend. "I thought that Grump might have finally lost her temper and made off with you."

"Grump? Make off wi' me? Are you mad? Old Grumpie wouldn't be able ter to lift a hammer, even if she wanted ter." He hobbled over to Hiccup, and placed his hands, or hand, to be precise, on his shoulders. "Well, now there's a sight I'd never thought I'd live to see."

"And what might that be, exactly?" Hiccup asked.

"Hiccup being the leader of the pack," He said softly. "I've watched you grow up, Hiccup, through the best, and worst, of times, and I can honestly say that todayâ€| today, Hiccup, you have finally become the man we all hoped you'd be."

"Thanks, Gobber." Hiccup embraced his old friend. "Now, are those dragons ready?"

"Ready as they'll ever be, Hiccup." Gobber turned around, and behind him were a group of dragons and their attendant handlers.

"Excellent." Hiccup said. "Excellent. Let's get this show on the road then, shall we?" At that, he went up to the handlers and took the dragons from them, letting them get back to their other duties. Whilst Hiccup led the dragons to their prospective new riders, Gobber sat on a crate next to Cloudjumper.

"Aye, who would've thought it, eh?" He said to Valka. "Hiccup finally taking the lead." Valka could only smile proudly.

Once the dragons were in place, he turned to his students, and cleared his throat to get their attention.

"So, these are the dragons we have available for you to try," He gestured to the dragons in turn. "We have a couple of Deadly Nadders, two Monstrous Nightmares, a Hideous Zippleback, a Whispering Death and, a relatively new resident of Berk, this handsome Stormcutter.

Now, who'd like to go first?" He could have bet money on it, for of course, Frigga immediately shot to her feet.

"Stand back, kiddies." She leered at the others. "Let me show you how the Jorgensons do things!" She walked to the front and stood next to Hiccup, waiting for his instruction to begin.

"Now, the most important thing that any dragon rider has to have is trust." Hiccup explained. "Without that bond between you and your dragon, you'll never develop the deep connection you need to be able to work together. When you fly with your dragon, you should be aiming not just to fly on him, but to fly with him. And the initial bond you make with him or her is the most important of all." He positioned her ahead of him, facing the assembled dragons. "When you approach your dragon for the first time, you must do so with absolute confidence. If they can sense even the slightest anxiety, they will shirk away from you. And one last thing." She looked at him impatiently. "Remember, this isn't just you choosing your dragon; your dragon is also choosing you. Never force a dragon to submit to you. You must let them come to you. I have absolute faith in you, Frigga. In all of you. Choose well." And with that, he stepped back and sat next to the other students, studying Frigga, wondering what she would do.

When Hiccup had explained the process, Frigga turned to look at the dragons. She walked up and down the line, almost swaggering as she did so, exerting her authority, testing their resolve. Most of the dragons sensed her overbearing persona; the Nadders instinctively stepped back, whilst the Zippelback sparked at her. The Whispering Death actually cowered behind the Stormcutter, who treated her with cool indifference. She went down the line of candidates three times, until she stopped before one of the Nightmares. Unlike her brother's, this one had a purple body, with blue and red flecks across his wings. He wasn't perturbed by this girl like the others, and confidently stepped forward.

Hiccup could see Gobber tense slightly, ready to spring into action should things go wrong. But his fear was in vain, for the dragon simply looked her square in the eye, their gazes locked on each other. Frigga slowly raised her hand, and placed her palm at arm's length. The dragon sniffed it once, twice, and then, after a seconds pause, placed his snout in her palm, purring softly in his throat.

The assembled crowd applauded them, and Frigga smiled victoriously.

"Well done, Frigga." Hiccup said encouragingly. "It seems that the Jorgensons have a way with Monstrous Nightmares."

"Oh, please." She snorted. "My brother wouldn't know what a bond with a dragon was if it reared up and bit him in the - "

"Yes, well done, Frigga!" Hiccup announced just a little too loudly than was necessary. "So, a male Nightmare, quite young, no more than a year or so older than you. Feisty nature. This one's a warrior for sure, fit for a warrior rider." Frigga smirked at the compliment. "He answers to the name of ThunderClaw."

"ThunderClaw." Frigga murmured, trying the name out. "A strong name,

for a strong dragon. I think you and I are going to be best of friends, ThunderClaw." He growled his agreement, nuzzling into her body affectionately as they walked off to the side of the arena together, where Gobber was waiting to size them up for saddles.

"Well, here's to our first successful pairing today." Hiccup became more confident with the roaring (**A/N: Oh, I'm punny!**) success so far. He looked around the remaining four, wondering who to choose next.

"Next up, why don't we haveâ€| Hilda!" The little girl jumped in surprise at her name being called, clearly nervous at the prospect of being singled out by the chief, but Magnus reached over and whispered something in her ear. She nodded, and stood up, slowly walking towards Hiccup. Hiccup gave Magnus an appreciative nod, glad that he had judged him so well. Hilda stood by Hiccup timidly, so he knelt down, forcing himself to talk up to her.

"Hey, there," He said softly, holding her hands whilst he did. "There's no need to be afraid. These guys won't do anything to hurt you. They just want to be your friend." She nodded unconvincingly, as if she might start to cry if she tried to speak. "I'm going to be with you every step of the way, ok?" He squeezed her hands encouragingly, and pushed her gently towards the dragons. As she timidly walked up to them, the Nadders stalked over towards her, sniffing her gently, but soon realised that she wasn't for either of them. The Zippelback ignored her completely, more interested in sparring with the remaining Nightmare. One look at the Stormcutter and Hilda knew immediately not to even bother, which left her with the Whispering Death.

Now, even the most jaded Vikings will instinctively give these tunnel borers a wide berth, what with their six circular rows of rotating teeth, and the ability to spout fire rings as easily as some people blow smoke rings, but for some strange reason, when Hilda looked at the timid dragon, she didn't feel afraid, or nervous. In fact, she almost felt pity for the poor thing â€" it was obviously more terrified than she was. She cautiously stepped towards it, only for the dragon to shrink back. She thought for a moment, then put her hand out timidly towards the dragon. The Whispering Death looked at the hand, and slowly snaked towards her, as if she might lash out at any second. He sniffed at her hand, then he gently rubbed his nose against her hand. Emboldened by the reaction, she rubbed his snout, smiling when he purred deep in his throat, and when he nudged against her body, she hugged the dragon as best she could, her short arms barely reaching halfway across his bulbous head.

Hiccup was amazed. The first time he had encountered a Whispering Death, his dragon had had a vendetta against it. He would never have imagined that this shy young girl would befriend such a formidable looking creature.

"Well done, Hilda!" He applauded her encouragingly, but she had eyes only for her new friend. "He only came to us a few days ago." Hiccup explained, now standing next to them, scratching the equally timid dragon behind the ears. "He doesn't even have a name yet. What are you going to call him?" Hilda looked at her dragon, thinking of a good name.

"Oh, I know!" She suddenly piped up. "Varmthjerte."

"Varmthjerte?" Hiccup couldn't even pronounce the word properly, but the Whispering Death wriggled its body excitedly, obviously liking the name. "Well, I think someone likes it. Varmthjerte it is." Hiccup stood aside as they made their way over to where Gobber and Frigga were discussing the saddle design, making gestures that indicated sharp edges were a major point of interest. When Frigga saw Hilda come over, she looked at the girl, then at her new dragon, then back at the girl with astonishment, before nodding appreciatively. She was clearly impressed, and Hiccup knew that she had made an unlikely friend in that little girl.

He looked back at the group expectantly. Harald and Greta both looked at Magnus, but he gestured for them to go ahead. They both stood up and walked towards Hiccup.

"So, you guys have any questions?" They shook their heads simultaneously. "Ok, then. Good luck." He stood aside and let them approach the remaining dragons. They looked up and down the group, pointing out features on one dragon, then another, but without saying barely a word, as if they had their own secret code that was less verbal than physical. The Zippelback, having squarely beaten the Nightmare, took notice of the pair, and seeing two of them together, immediately stalked towards them. The pair looked at the Zippelback, who was clearly showing off, before looking at each other and nodding an affirmative. The Zippelback stepped towards them hopefully, but before it could so much as chirp at them, Harald and Greta walked straight past it and towards the two Nadders. Hiccup giggled quietly into his hand â€“ his instincts had been right all along.

The Nadders immediately stalked up to the young Vikings, and after they had sniffed them carefully, they immediately bonded with them. Hiccup clapped at their success, before gesturing to the group behind them. As they passed, he caught a snippet of their conversation.

"I think you should be called Donner." Harald was talking to his Nadder, a deep red female with flecks of green and orange on her tail and wings.

"And you should be Blitzen." Greta told her dragon, a slightly spindly male, who was deep blue almost everywhere on his body.

Finally, Hiccup turned to Magnus. They shared a familiar look, one that they had developed over the years that Hiccup and Astrid had dated. It was a look that they shared every time the rest of the Hoffersons, and Stoick included when he was present, descended into either an argument or a traditional Viking drinking song. It was a look that said, _For the sake of our collective sanity, we would make very good friends._ Magnus stood up and walked over to Hiccup.

"So." He said simply.

"So." Hiccup answered. "Today's the day, huh?"

"Yep."

"You ready?"

"As I'll ever be."

"Well, I'd say good luck, but you never seem to need it." Hiccup smiled at the young adolescent, who smiled back. As he walked off towards the dragons, excitement tainting his usually calm features, Hiccup wondered how good he was at public speaking. Magnus approached the dragons in a stoic manner. He studied the three remaining candidates calmly. On his left was the Nightmare, who was nursing a cut he had taken from the Zippelback. A Nightmare was a fine dragon, he reasoned, but it required a rider who was fierce by nature, almost violent. Magnus was far from it.

And then there were two.

He gazed at the Zippelback, who was now bickering with itself. Whilst he had heard that Zippelbacks were good all-rounders, as it were, he wasn't sure that he wanted to deal with the dragon's split personality. He didn't want to spend every five minutes resolving some dispute or another. He knew that he had to be one with his dragon.

And then there was one.

Hiccup stood up as Magnus' gaze moved towards the Stormcutter. Magnus considered the relatively stoic creature, but found that he couldn't read it like he could most people. It was as if the dragon was actively concealing its personality from him. The Stormcutter noticed the attention it was being given, and for the first time that morning, he stood up and paid attention to the Viking boy before him. He tilted his head to one side, fanning his frills, as he considered the boy before him.

As if on some divine instinct, Magnus lifted his hand towards the dragon, who responded by walking towards the boy. And for a moment, they did nothing but stare at each other, watching, assessing, weighing the risk. Then the Stormcutter closed its eyes, and nuzzled Magnus' palm for a moment, before reaching forward and nuzzling Magnus' nose with his. Magnus reached his arms around the Stormcutters head, and they gently leaned their foreheads together, eyes closed, simply acknowledging the presence of the other, as if nothing else in the world mattered.

Hiccup felt something tug on his heart when he saw it – here was a bond so strong that Hiccup had only seen it once before: that moment in the cove when he had finally, inevitably, inexorably bonded with Toothless. Although everyone had managed to form a bond with the dragons he had brought here today, this was undoubtedly the most successful.

"Well done, Magnus." He placed a hand on his young friend's shoulder. "Now there is a fine dragon." He looked over to see Valka and Cloudjumper walking towards them. "He was never given a name, either." Magnus looked into the deep blue eyes of his dragon, and it seemed as if they knew what the other was thinking. A name slowly formed in his head, as if put there by a god.

"Heimdall." Magnus said, softly, but with such authority that no one would dare to argue with him. "The sentinel at the gates of Asgard. He will watch over me, as I will watch over him."

"Now that is a good name." Hiccup agreed. Both men turned to see Valka and Cloudjumper behind them. Whilst Hiccup and Valka shared a smile, Magnus placed his arms behind his back, standing rather formally next to these titans of their society, and Heimdall adopted the same passive stance. Valka appraised the boy in front of her, as Cloudjumper appraised his dragon.

"What is your name?" Valka asked softly.

"Magnus. Magnus Hofferson."

"No." She replied. "You, my boy, are Magnus, Best of Men." Magnus shuffled uncomfortably at the title he had picked up somewhere along the line. "And the best of men you have proven to be." She placed a hand on his shoulder. "Not everyone can bond with a Stormcutter. Cloudjumper here took a long time to truly accept me. It may take you time as well, but trust me, when you have that trust with your dragon, there is nothing else on this earth that can replace it." She gently lifted his head with her free hand, so she could look straight at him. "Heimdall will defend you with his life if he has to, and be glad to do so. Now you must show him that you are equally as willing."

"I will." Magnus said confidently. Valka smiled at the boy, before embracing Hiccup and turning back to Cloudjumper. As Magnus and Heimdall walked over to join the others, Hiccup looked on with a sense of pride. When the old gang had gotten their dragons, it was with a mixture of guesswork, luck and the ever pressing need to stop his dad from doing something insanely stupid. They had worked together because they needed to. Now, for the first time, Hiccup had managed to do something properly. He had finally become Berk's legendary Dragon Master. His heart was almost bursting with pride.

* * *

><p>Back at their house, Astrid was taking the day off from anything involving physical exercise. For some reason, she had felt rather drained when she woke up this morning. Perhaps it was the mind-blowing sex that she and Hiccup had had the night before. After eating a breakfast of smoked haddock (which was unusual, since she normally preferred fresh cod), she had decided to do a little work around the house. Spruce things up a bit, in case an unexpected visitor came around.</p>

It was just as well, for Mildew, of all people, had come calling. After the whole hoo-hah with Alvin the Treacherous and Dagur the Deranged, Mildew had returned to Berk, this time with a dragon of his own, a Deadly Nadder he had named Typhoon. (**A/N: Yes, the one and only Typhoon belongs to Mildew. Go figure.**) He often came around to ask Astrid for advice about caring for Typhoon, especially now he had grown close to Stormfly. Despite everything that had happened, Astrid could sense that he had been changed by the events. Mildew had softened into quite an amiable old man, compared to the cranky, miserable cretin he had been before, and Astrid actually enjoyed his visits. In return for the advice she gave him, he would tell her stories about the things he had seen in her life, his experiences with his dragon, and his surprisingly exotic adventures in his youth.

After he had left, thanking her for the advice and the tea she had

made for them, she went about cleaning up some loose clothing that was lying about. She picked up one of Hiccup's tunics, and lying underneath them were some small garments that she recognised as being the ones she used when her monthly cycle came around. It was as she placed them into the basket that she realised that she couldn't remember the last time she had used them.

Thinking she must be due soon, she recounted the days in her head, accounting for the variability she always had, and then froze, dropping the basket. She had counted six weeks since the last time she had used them, and while it always varied a bit, it never varied that much. Astrid looked down at her stomach, a look of wonder and incredulity on her face, and realised that her exhaustion was nothing to do with her fiancÃ©. Well, it actually had an awful lot to do with him, but not from last night. Likely not from last night anyway.

Despite her instincts, though, she had to know for sure. She ran out of the house, hopped onto Stormfly and flew up to Gothi's hut, as she was the village medicine woman.

A few minutes later, she was sat on a bench in Gothi's hut, the elderly woman bustling about gathering various herbs, teas and tinctures for Astrid. She had just been given the news of a lifetime, news which might send any other girl into a panic, but only one thought filled Astrid's mind:

I can only dream what Hiccup's reaction will be!_

* * *

><p>After a hard day of training the new recruits, and with still no sign of Toothless, or Astragard for that matter, Hiccup had ambled slowly back to his house, tired, cold and ready for a hot meal and bed. He opened the front door and saw Astrid sitting on the old rocking chair that his dad had sometimes used, rocking back and forth gently. Hiccup smiled, and saw on her face an expression that he had never seen before: it was as if Astrid was almost glowing. She had a small beatific smile on her face, and he could tell that she had some big news for him.</p>

"Hey there, beautiful." He announced himself, causing Astrid to beam at him. "There room for two on there?" She giggled, patting the seat next to her. Hiccup sat down, and Astrid cuddled into him. Hiccup knew something was up.

"How was your day?" She asked.

"Oh, it was pretty good, actually. I inducted some new recruits into the academy, and paired them off with their dragons."

"That's good. Who was there?"

"Well, there was Snotlouts sister, Frigga. She found herself a Nightmare, ThunderClaw. Seemed fitting really." She murmured her agreement. "Then there was Harald and Greta. They both took the Nadder twins we found. Named them Donner and Blitzen. Little Hilda was there too. Would you believe she befriended a Whispering Death?"

"No way!" Astrid stared at him incredulously. "A Whispering Death? For Hilda?"

"I know, I could hardly believe my eyes. It was the really timid one that Fishlegs and the twins found two days ago. She named him Varmthjerte."

"Awww." Astrid cooed. "That's adorable. Anyone else."

"Just one." Hiccup smiled. "Magnus."

"Wait," Astrid looked at him. "Magnus?" Hiccup nodded.

"Magnus got his dragon?" Astrid hugged him tightly. "Oh, that's great! What did he choose?"

"The Stormcutter that we rescued from that trap the other day." Hiccup started to stroke her hair. "Named him Heimdall."

"That's wonderful."

"It is." Hiccup realised that he was going to have to ask. "And what of you, my dearest? What have you done today?"

"Oh, nothing much." She said. "Cleaned around the house a bit. Mildew came around earlier, so we shared some tea, advice and stories, as usual."

"Astrid, I know you're avoiding something. What is it that has you so beautifully happy?" She beamed at him, her face barely containing the smile.

"Well, I have some news."

"Good news, I see."

"Very good." She kissed him gently on the lips, before looking straight at him, her eyes betraying her excitement.

"Hiccup, my amazing, wonderful fiancÃ©, you're going to be a father."

8. Hiccup's Parenting Debut

Greetings, dear readers, and welcome to chapter 8, in which Hiccup deals with fatherly revelations, Toothless returns and the greatest of all gifts which is Hope is bestowed upon the residents of Berk.

My eternal thanks, as always, to my reviewers: Backlash 42, madeline . kallis, GwuncanGirl0203, Remedy's Melody 109, CherryPika91 and Aniwolfgirl, who I have two words for that will sum up the entire chapter: BABY FURIES!

Enjoy!

**DISCLAIMER: Despite the ridiculous number of OC's that are appearing in this story, I do not, even by virtue of majority character ownership, own the HTTYD franchise, and any and all

characters, places and themes, which belong to Dreamworks Animation and Cressida Cowell.**

* * *

><p>Hiccup's Parenting Debut

It took a moment for the news to sink into Hiccup's head. Then it hit him, and for a moment, he was completely stunned.

I'm going to be a father! This was the first coherent thought that formed in his head, followed closely by: Odin help us all.

Now, all young Viking men know that there is a very particular established series of protocols that must be observed in this situation. First, if the unborn child was conceived out of wedlock, immediately marry the pregnant girl. Hiccup had already hit that particular nail on the head, as it were. Secondly, ensure that the girl in question is ready for the big change. One look at Astrid's face confirmed this. And thirdly, placate said girl's parents at earliest opportunity, preferably with various material gifts and oaths to ensure the well-being of their daughter. He was the chief. Finn Hofferson liked him.

Having now satisfied the three protocols, there was only one thing Hiccup could do. And it was literally the last thing Astrid could have ever anticipated.

Hiccup looked straight at her, gave her the biggest smile he was capable of giving and hugged her so hard that he literally swept her off her feet (fairly impressive, as he had managed this from a sitting position, and with only one leg) and spun them both around the room, laughing his delight.

"Really?" He asked, his delight risking the early onset of Snoggletog for the second time in as many days. "I'm going to be a father?!"

"Yes, Hiccup!" Astrid laughed, secretly relieved that he was taking things so well. "I'm pregnant!" Hiccup hugged her tight again, his ecstasy almost giving off a palpable aura of joy, before he suddenly stood up straight, a thought crossing his mind.

"Who else knows?" He asked.

"Only Gothi." Astrid assured her excited fiancÃ©. "Do you honestly think I would tell anyone else before you?" Hiccup could only smile, tears of joy beginning to form in his big, green eyes.

"Oh, Astrid!" Hiccup kissed her gently.

"I guess it's safe to assume you're happy about this?" Astrid asked him teasingly.

"Happy?! Astrid, this is the best news I could possibly have come home to!" He laughed ecstatically, before taking a few deep breaths to calm himself, thinking about what needed to be done. "Ok. Ok. Well, we should tell someone."

"Ok. Who?"

"Well," Hiccup sat down on the stairs, Astrid sitting beside him. "We should tell our parents first. I'll tell my mom, do you want to tell your parents?"

"Actually, I'd better tell Magnus first. That way, we can tell them together, and he can stop my dad from attempting to dismember you, or something."

"Yeah, that's a good idea. I should also tell Gobber, and Traask of course. I think we can rely on Gobber to act as the root of the grapevine." His face fell as a rather disturbing thought crossed his mind. "What do we tell the gang?" Astrid's face turned serious, not having considered that herself, either.

"Um?" They looked at each other, their faces mirroring the quandary they faced, before they burst out laughing again. As they recovered, Hiccup put his arms around Astrid and hugged her tightly, as she responded just as warmly.

Hiccup then put his right hand over her stomach, causing them both to smile.

"Wow." He breathed, the reality of the situation hitting him now he had come down off cloud nine. "An actual baby. Our baby." Astrid smiled, leaning her head on his shoulder, as he laid his head against hers. "I know I'll never be able to show you how much I love you right now, Astrid, but I can tell you one thing."

"What's that?"

"I'll spend the rest of my life trying." They held each other on those stairs for a long time, before they eventually got up to eat, and then went straight to bed, deciding to spread the message tomorrow. It was as they were getting undressed for bed that Toothless finally flew in through the open window.

"Hey, bud!" Hiccup hugged his friend's head, who warbled happily in return. "You enjoy yourself these past couple of days?" Toothless nodded happily, his tongue hanging out as it always did when he was really happy. "Well, we've got some news I think you had better hear." Hiccup looked over at Astrid, who smiled and walked over towards them. "You see, Astrid and I are going to be parents." Hiccup never ceased to be amazed by the raw intelligence of his dragon, for although he was pretty sure Toothless had no knowledge of human anatomy other than the most basic, the black dragon immediately sniffed gently at Astrid's stomach, before emitting an ecstatic warble that made Astrid laugh and coo at the same time, before scratching behind Toothless' ears and hugging his head, just as Hiccup had done.

Suddenly, Toothless jumped up on the windowsill, and beckoned for Hiccup to follow him outside. Hiccup shrugged at Astrid.

"I guess he wants to show me something." Hiccup said.

"Well, let's not keep him waiting then." She kissed Hiccup on the cheek. "Don't you boys be out late, now." She said sternly, but smiling.

"We won't be, milady." Hiccup mock bowed, before pulling his old leather jacket on and walking outside to meet Toothless. When he got there, Toothless crouched down, indicating that he wanted to fly. Hiccup quickly mounted his friend, eager to fly again after being stuck on the ground for two days, and Toothless took off into the night sky. It was a surreal experience for Hiccup — he had never flown with Toothless using his auto-tail. Hiccup just sat back and let Toothless do all the flying. So this is what it's like for all the others. Hiccup observed. It was then that he realised why the others sometimes had difficulty bonding with their dragons. If he and Toothless had been this detached from the beginning, they certainly wouldn't enjoy the same relationship as they did now.

The flight didn't last long. Toothless had flown out to the cove at Raven's Point. When they landed, Hiccup dismounted, wondering why he had been brought here. Not that he minded, as the place was very special to them. Toothless warbled to get his rider's attention, and then Hiccup saw why they had come here — Toothless had walked over to the edge of the cove, under the shelter of some overhanging trees, and there, curled up beneath them, was Astragard. Hiccup smiled, before walking over to the pair. His suspicions about their mutual absence were confirmed, it seemed. But as he ducked to enter the little shelter, he noticed that it wasn't just a few overhanging branches anymore. Someone — presumably the two Night Furies — had added to it, and fleshed it out into a full blown nest, with branches, boulders, leaves, even some caked-on dirt —

Hiccup backtracked his chain of thought by a few words, until he got to the key word in his ramblings. Nest. It hit him then exactly what it was he was looking at.

Hiccup looked at Toothless, then at Astragard, his face asking one question: Is this what I think it is? As if to answer his question, Astragard cooed at him, before slowly standing up, revealing a small indentation in the floor where her hind legs had been a moment ago. It was packed with rocks and gravel, which had obviously been heated up several times with dragonfire, and in the centre of the bowl was a clutch of shiny, smooth black — "Eggs!" Hiccup exclaimed. "You guys laid eggs together!" He looked at Toothless, his face bearing that big goofy smile he gave when he was exceptionally happy. Toothless' expression couldn't be prouder, or happier, if he tried.

"Wow, guys, this is fantastic! I'm really happy for you guys. If you need me or the others to do anything, just come and get —" His tirade of congratulations was interrupted by a small wobbling sound coming from one of the eggs, followed by the unmistakable cracking sound of an egg hatching.

The three of them all leaned forward, just in time to see the wobbling egg gain a patchwork of cracks around its top. It wobbled more enthusiastically, causing the cracks to spread, when suddenly, the egg cracked open, and a tiny black snout poked out, followed by the face of the first baby Night Fury Hiccup had ever seen. It opened its azure eyes, and emitted the most endearing squeak Hiccup had ever heard, as his smile threatened to escape the confines of his face again. He was so ecstatic, he was unable to speak. He simply smiled at Toothless, the joyous tears finally breaking free, who licked his nose gently in response.

Then, Toothless looked down at the hatchling — his hatchling —

and gently licked the yolk off its head. The baby Fury cooed happily, before it flared its wings and cast off the rest of its shell. The hatchling ruffled its wings, as Toothless leaned his snout to gently lick the rest of the yolk off his firstborn. When he finished, the hatchling jumped up onto its father's head, where it curled up there and promptly fell asleep. Toothless slowly lifted his head, as if frightened to move, and then did something that Hiccup never forgot: he moved his head towards Hiccup, offering the newborn hatchling to his best friend. The look that Hiccup gave him I can't say here — the word has yet to be invented to describe the expression of pure love, joy, happiness and trust that Hiccup gave Toothless then.

As carefully as he could, Hiccup lifted the baby Fury off Toothless' head, and gently cradled the tiny creature in his left arm, his right hand gently stroking the little hatchlings head and neck. The Viking chief sat cross-legged, awed at the level of trust that his friend had given him. There's another thing I'll never be able to thank him enough for. As he rocked the hatchling gently, it woke up, and looked at the human, its blue eyes fully dilate. The eyes were apparently proportionally larger in Fury infants than they were in adults, putting to shame the most adorable face Toothless had ever pulled. Hiccup offered his finger to the dragon, something he had seen others do with newborn animals. Immediately, the hatchling started sucking on it, its eyes half-closed, its tiny ears perked up. Hiccup recognised from Toothless that this usually indicated happiness. Hiccup took this opportunity to sex the infant.

"Congratulations," He muttered, more to himself than the new parents nearby. "It's a girl." Toothless warbled happily, bringing Hiccup's attention back to his best friend.

"Toothless," Hiccup said. "I don't know what I did to deserve you, but I will never stop being thankful I did." He reached over and placed his hand on Toothless' snout, the same way he did on that fateful day five years ago, and Toothless responded by leaning into it, his eyes closed, their mutual trust unbreakable against anything. "You never cease to astound me, bud." Hiccup smiled, his joyful tears leaving trackmarks down his cheeks. "Thank you for being my best friend. You are amazing."

Over the next hour, the five remaining eggs hatched, and Hiccup shared the honour of helping the greatest friend he had ever had bring his firstborn children into the world, four males and two females. He never did come home early that night. In fact, they never went home at all.

* * *

><p>Astrid woke up the next morning to the sound of Terrible Terrors singing on a nearby rooftop. Their cheerful chorus had greeted the sun every day since the end of the war, and Astrid never grew tired of being woken by their beautiful harmonies. She leaned over to kiss her darling love awake, and was greeted instead by his absence. Astrid sat up, utterly confused, and then realised that he had never come home with Toothless the previous night.</p>

What in Thor's name are those two up to that could keep them away all night? She wondered, before getting dressed and heading downstairs to make herself breakfast. She smiled at the thought that,

even though Hiccup was gone, there was still technically two of them at the table that morning. As she left the house, firstly to find Hiccup and then to start spreading the good news, she saw Valka and Gobber talking in the plaza, and made her way over to them.

"Morning!" She said cheerfully. "Have you two seen Hiccup today?"

"Well, that's it!" Gobber threw his arms up in defeat. "If Astrid can't tell us where the damned lad is, then he's gone!"

"You mean, you don't know either?"

"No, we've been looking for him all morning." Valka looked concerned. "You've no idea where he might be?"

"Well, he went flying with Toothless last night, and he said he'd be back soon after, but he never came home."

"Well, so long as he's with that Night Fury, he's fine." Gobber said, reassuring himself more than anyone. "I mean, come on. It's a Night Fury!" Just as he said that, they heard the telltale sound of said Night Fury approaching at high speed. "Ah, there he is. And about time too." Gobber muttered. As they walked over to where Astragard, Toothless and Hiccup had landed, Traask fell in besides them.

"Ah, finally." He said relieved. "I was wondering where Astragard had got to. You'd almost think she had gone to have a baby!" Traask stopped in his tracks, getting funny glances from the others, for he had just seen Hiccup and more importantly, the wrapped bundle he was carrying very, very carefully.

"No." Traask whispered, a smile slowly appearing. "No!" He ran towards the dragons, but had eyes only for his nephew. "Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, please tell me that is what I think it is!" Hiccup smiled at him as he carefully dismounted Toothless, the other three now gathered around carefully.

"Well, Astrid, it seems we've got another thing we need to tell everyone." He slowly lifted the blanket of the bundle he was carrying, revealing the bleary-eyed Fury hatchlings to Berk for the first time, squeaking in the weak light of the morning sun.

Astrid literally squealed at the sight, Gobber stood there gobsmacked, just as Traask did, but Valka slowly stepped towards her son, hardly believing what she was seeing. A single tear fell from the corner of her eye, and for the third time in three days, Snoggletog threatened to come early, as she almost tackled her brother with the tightest hug she could give, her eyes streaming tears of joy, as he simply laughed, spinning her around in excitement.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Hiccup announced emotionally, his own eyes threatening to spill over. "May I present the newest additions to the family of Berk." They all gathered around, the women cooing loudly over the adorable Fury hatchlings, the men simply awestruck at the turn of events, until Gobber asked the inevitable question.

"You said there was another thing yer had to tell us?" Hiccup and

Astrid looked at each other, a swift conversation passing between their eyes, before Hiccup turned to his mother and said, "I think you had better come with us."

9. Enemies, Old and New

Greetings, dear readers, and welcome to chapter 9! Where we see the aftermath of the Big Announcement, how Hiccup deals with hangovers, the invention of mattresses, dark forces stirring in the fog of uncharted lands, the love between Hiccup and Astrid explored to depths never before seen and the twist in the tale, when the laws of time seem to be suspiciously absent. Many thanks again to my dedicated reviewers, Backlash 42, madeline . kallis, GwuncanGirl0203, Remedy's Melody 109, CherryPika91, Aniwolfgirl and The dragon1010. Virtual cookies on the house for you all. Enjoy!

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* * *

><p>Enemies Old and New

Hiccup woke up in a very awkward fashion. First, he opened one eye, then the other, blinked twice, and immediately wished he'd stayed asleep. His head felt like Meatlug had used it for a chew toy, his mouth felt like he'd eaten sawdust, and he experienced for the first time the truly surreal experience of getting more feeling from his prosthetic leg than his real one.

To say that Hiccup was hung over was a humongous understatement. After a few minutes, Hiccup worked up the courage to lift his head and gaze blearily around the table. At least, he assumed it was a table. He looked to his left, and saw that Gobber was still asleep, lucky bastard. He looked to his right and saw Finn Hofferson holding an ice block to his head. He nodded an acknowledgement towards Hiccup, wincing as he did so. At least Hiccup was now reassured that sudden and violent dismemberment of his diminutive form was not imminent. Thank the gods for Magnus Hofferson.

He looked across the table, and realised that he was actually experiencing the aftermath of one humdinger of a party. Ruffnut was slouched across Tuffnut's shoulders, he himself passed out on the table, whilst Fishlegs was snoring away, using Meatlug as the world's most uncomfortable pillow. Traask had fortunately managed to find a few old furs to crash on, before Valka had crashed onto him. Wow, even mom managed to get wasted. Hiccup thought gently, trying to fire as few neurones as possible.

Then Hiccup saw something surprising – all three Jorgensons, in descending order of age, doing synchronous push-ups on the floor of the Meade Hall.

How in Hel's name do they all manage to hold their alcohol so well? Hiccup mentally exclaimed, immediately regretting his antisocial thinking. Looking beyond the Jorgensons, who had now moved onto various stretches, Hiccup saw a wave of devastation, empty mead barrels and snoring Vikings radiate away from their table. Hiccup

then remembered what the party had been in aid of, and wondered exactly how many of Berk's citizens didn't know about his foray into parenthood.

Well, he actually knew exactly who didn't, although if Typhoon was in any way as promiscuous as Hiccup was, Mildew would be finding out very shortly, with the double bonus of avoiding the mass alcohol imburement that had ensued.

* * *

><p>"Well, as long as you're sure that you can look after the hatchlings by yourself." Mildew reassured Astrid, over a cup of mint tea. "And just remember, if you need any help, you know where to find me."</p>

"Thanks, Mildew." Astrid smiled, still amazed that the man she was happily having an engaging conversation about dragons with was once the bane of their existence. "I'm sure I'll be able to handle them. Besides, I really could use the practise." They both laughed at that little quip.

"Yes, I heard. My congratulations, Astrid. You and Hiccup will make wonderful parents, I'm sure."

"Aw, thank you, Mildew." She almost blushed as Mildew made to leave.

"Well, I'd better get back to my cabbage fields." He drained the last of his tea, grabbed his staff and walked out the house towards Typhoon, Astrid following him. As he approached his dragon, he gave the regal Nadder a scratch behind the ears, causing Typhoon to purr gently.

"To think, I used to hate dragons." Mildew said thoughtfully. "And now, I can't think of what my life might be like without Typhoon here." He looked down at his feet, wrapped up in a tangle of thoughts. "I don't have much longer left for this world, Astrid."

"Oh, don't say that Mildew!"

"Astrid," He walked over to Astrid and placed a hand on her shoulder. "When you reach my age, when your birthdays are just numbers you wish you didn't have to count, you'll realise that, when approaching the end, it's not all that bad. We all have to die sometime, and after watching three wives depart ahead of you for the long table, there comes a time when you're ready to die, even, perhaps, waiting for it." He looked out across the village, watching the people bustle about, going to and fro about their business. "I still have a few years left, no doubt about that. You can't get rid of me that quickly." Astrid laughed. "Butâ€œ this dragon rider business, it's a young man's game, Astrid. It's for the likes of you and Hiccup, the Jorgensons, the Thorston twins. I'm an old man now. Older man, I should say. There will come a time when the Valkyries will come for me." He turned back to Typhoon, his face etched with an emotion that Astrid couldn't recognise. "When that happens, Typhoon will be alone in this world. He would be my only regret." Mildew looked at Astrid, an almost pleading expression in his eyes. "When I'm gone, would you take him? I couldn't bear the thought of him being abandoned after I

move on." He looked like he could burst into tears at any moment.

"Of course I will, Mildew." She placed a hand on his shoulder, reassuring him. "The dragons brought us closer together, they showed us the world in an entirely new perspective. They made us greater than we could ever have made ourselves. We would never abandon them now. To do so would be inhumane." Astrid reached over to stroke Typhoon's snout, eliciting a comfortable hum from the Nadder. They had brought them closer together. Not so long ago, if anyone had told her she would become good friends with Mildew, she would have laughed her heart out and whacked them over the head with the flat side of her battleaxe for good measure.

"Dragons are amazing creatures, aren't they?" Mildew murmured, scratching Typhoon's neck again.

"That they are, Mildew. That they are."

* * *

><p>Whilst Hiccup was recovering from his father-to-be party, and Astrid was enjoying their now regular morning tea with Mildew, Toothless had bigger responsibilities to see to. Namely, raising a clutch of six Night Fury hatchlings. Fortunately, he had all the help he needed in Astragard, his beloved mate. Whilst he was looking after the infants, she had gone fishing for their breakfast.</p>

It had occurred to Toothless that they would have to be given names at some point. Dragons had never really needed names before â€“ you could identify and describe an individual by such things as their scent or their unique markings, or even their posture and gait, to other dragons â€“ but it seemed to be the custom to name everyone here amongst the Vikings. He would probably have to get Hiccup to come up with some names; dragons, as a rule, were pretty useless at it.

Toothless watched his children with a contented expression. Right now, they were all curled up asleep on a large flagstone in the plaza, basking in the meagre warmth of Berk's autumn sun. Thankfully, the universal dragonese ability to breathe fire has translated into all dragons being able to generate their own internal heat source, meaning that they can withstand prolonged exposure to the frigid environment of winter in the Barbaric Archipelago. Toothless found the snoozing forms of his progeny to be quite a comforting sight, but that was nothing compared to the villagers' reactions.

The general level of activity in the plaza had increased fivefold since Toothless and family had turned up. They all wanted to see the new Night Furies, especially the children. As he watched, Toothless saw that the crowding in the plaza had begun to centralize around them. He gave the nearest group a stern look, warning them off, but the Vikings were used to dragons now. That wouldn't keep them at bay forever. Slowly, they all started to crowd around Toothless and the hatchlings, despite his obvious irritation. He was standing protectively over his children now, hissing at the approaching crowd. He was considering taking the hatchlings elsewhere, or even doing something drastic to disperse the crowds, when help suddenly arrived from an unexpected quarter.

"Alright, people, let's move it along now! Move it along!" Toothless looked to see Snotlout and the Twins, closely followed by the newest academy recruits, dispersing the crowds and sending them away from the plaza. "Let's give the guy some room!" Snotlout called out, turning to give Toothless a conspiratorial wink. Toothless settled down again, as Frigga, who he remembered was Snotlout's sister, and the Twins took up defensive positions around them, the others being directed by Snotlout in crowd control. Just as Toothless had sat down again, a young boy came and sat on the flagstones next to him. He was about to scare him off, when he realised it was Astrid's brother, Magnus, who just smiled at Toothless before gently stroking his nose. Toothless would have relaxed at that point, but he noticed a commotion going on in front of Snotlout. Some of the villagers, it seemed, had taken offence at Snotlout moving them on.

"What business is it of yours telling us where we can and can't be in the village?" One particularly affronted Viking with a very impressive moustache was arguing with him.

"It's the business of the Academy if you insist on spending your free time pestering the dragons! Especially when said dragon has a clutch of newborns to look after!"

"Well, I'm not sure I like your tone, young man!" The other Viking stated threateningly, as the people behind him prepared to get violent.

"So that's how it's gonna be, huh?" Snotlout muttered. Then, Snotlout turned around and whistled loudly. A second later, Hookfang and ThunderClaw soared into the plaza, all flamed up, growling threateningly at the villagers, whilst overhead, Barf & Belch, Heimdall, Varmthjerte, Donner and Blitzen circled, waiting for the command to attack if necessary.

Suddenly, the Vikings in the crowd remembered that they were late for a very urgent, generically vague appointment that had to be kept at all costs, and quickly vacated the plaza. Snotlout grinned menacingly, nodding to himself.

"Works every time!" He chuckled. Then he noticed his father, Spitelout, leaning against a post. Snotlout became serious for a moment, as did Frigga behind him. Toothless had often observed that their father was a very strict man, who didn't take failure well. But today, they needn't have been worried, for Spitelout simply nodded at them, a proud smile on his face, before walking back to their house. Toothless could see Snotlout and Frigga visibly inflate, their pride seeming to lift them an inch off the floor.

The danger passed, Snotlout gave directions for the academy students to follow him on Hookfang, whilst Barf & Belch and the Twins would stick around to discourage the crowds from forming again. Toothless finally relaxed, and not a moment too soon, for one of the hatchlings had woken up, and was demanding his attention. He noticed it was the azure eyed female, the first to have hatched last night, and then he realised something truly astounding. She wasn't just attracting his attention — she was attempting to talk in dragonese.

_Papa? _She asked tentatively, stumbling over her words. _You papa?_

Toothless' jaw dropped. The last time he had been this astounded was when Hiccup had rigged him up with the prosthetic tail for the very first time, and he had come to the conclusion then that Hiccup was utterly insane. To be honest, Hiccup had done very little since then to disprove that statement. The idea of a day old hatchling actually talking was ludicrous â€“ even the fastest learners among the dragons took 6 months just to say _Gaah!_

And yet, here he is, watching his day old daughter attempting her first words.

_Papa? _She asked again, her eyes betraying actual nervousness. It occurred to Toothless that she wasn't just trying to talk aimlessly, she was actually attempting to communicate; she needed to know this was her father.

_Yes. _Toothless rubbed his nose gently against hers, talking in what would have been a reassuring voice. _Me papa._

Papa! She squeaked, before chasing her own tail in excitement and leaping up onto his head before promptly curling up and falling asleep, again. Toothless smiled, before gently resting his head to the floor. He noticed that Ruffnut had watched the entire thing, and was actively resisting the urge to engulf one or both of them in a bearhug. Tuffnut, he noticed, was shaking his head at his sister, although he smiled as he did so, before actually standing guard.

Toothless just smirked to himself, before settling into a more comfortable position on the flagstones. He may have allowed Hiccup to hold his firstborn mere seconds after hatching, but that was different. Hiccup had saved his life, allowed him to fly again, and liberated all of his friends â€“ who, almost by definition, were also his family â€“ from the rule of the false alpha. Toothless owed him everything, and likely Hiccup felt the same way. If anything, Hiccup was the first true family he had ever had. The Thorston girl could never justify expecting the same level of familiarity from him.

As he was just beginning to fall asleep himself, he heard the sound of flapping wings, and looked up to see Astragard land next to them. As if on cue, the hatchlings woke up and immediately surrounded their mother, all demanding to be fed. Although Toothless would eventually end up as the kind of parent that would spoil his children rotten, Astragard was the ideal mother, stern but kind, and with a single, almost unnoticeable gesture, she managed to silence all of them. She then flicked her nose up, and they all lifted their heads and opened their jaws wide, allowing her to feed them each a portion of the fishy soup that she had pre-digested for them in a little sac just before her larynx.

Once sated, the hatchlings gathered again on the flagstone and resumed their favourite activity, which was, of course, sleeping. Her work done, Astragard nodded to herself, before laying down next to Toothless, snuggling into her bondmate affectionately. Toothless gently licked her right ear, returning her affection.

You know, Toothless said. _One day, you'll have to teach me that trick._ Astragard chuckled, before laying her head over his paws, him laying his head over hers, both watching their sleeping children with a mixture of joy and pride. They sat like that for a while, just

enjoying each other's company, until they eventually fell asleep. But not before Toothless had gathered up the hatchlings into their forepaws. He wasn't taking any chances with the villagers again, and whilst they might risk the wrath of one Night Fury, they certainly wouldn't test the mettle of two of them.

* * *

><p>Whilst Toothless napped in the plaza, his rider was doing much the same, but back at his house, in his bed, on his new, self-designed wool-filled pelt, which was infinitely comfier than the old wooden slats and furskin that he was used to. Even his pillows were stuffed with wool, and whilst they were sometimes itchy, the addition of an extra layer of velvet had sorted that problem. The pelt, which Traask had called a mattress when Hiccup noticed that the bunks in the airship used the same principle, was supported by a number of soft metal springs. Hiccup had invented this one day after Astrid had complained of a sore back. Upon testing it, Hiccup had discovered that his design made sleeping much more comfortable, and he had also felt more refreshed the next day. It also had the added advantage that it was much more comfortable, and much quieter, during sex. Not that the creaking of the wooden boards could compete with the profanities that they were both prone to when he was desperately fucking Astrid like a madman, but it was somewhat comforting to know that the neighbours no longer had the ability to judge their sexual prowess by simply counting the rate of creaks.

But, right now, Hiccup was not overly concerned with anything related to the neighbours, Astrid, sex with Astrid, or even sex in general. For the young chief was out cold, snoring gently, and generally feeling much better now that he didn't have to be conscious. He really was a lightweight when it came to alcohol. Fortunately, his libido made up for things, or so Astrid had reassured him, between heavy panting, whilst half-naked with her back across the table whilst Hiccup fucked her brains out, them both being too desperate to reach the bedroom. Ok, so maybe he was still a little interested in sex with Astrid.

* * *

><p>Things were pretty rosy in Berk, it had to be said. Things would be even rosier tomorrow after most of the population had recovered from their hangovers. But, far away, in a fortress surrounded by fog, deep in the forests of the Southern Angles, dark forces were beginning to stir, and things were not quite so rosy there.</p>

The lord of that dark citadel, Artemaigne, was sonorously surveying his troops, who were undergoing drills in the courtyard. The livery they wore over the armour was the same as the banner that flew over the citadel's keep: a sable banner, with two crossed red swords, and a chilling purple pentagram above them. Artemaigne was the current head of the family Krytarin, who had ruled the eastern area of the Southern Angles for over 400 years. The Krytarin's had traditionally enforced order with an iron fist, and Artemaigne was no exception. His soldiers were trained to be brutal on his subjects, and even more so on criminals and the enemies of their lord. The taxes he levied regularly were often steep, and many in number. Public floggings were a daily spectacle, and the stocks were rarely unoccupied. His dungeons were rarely filled to capacity, for the poor souls who ended

up there usually didn't last long; some were executed, often painfully, others died under the torture that Artemaigne regularly ordered, and the rest died either of disease or starvation.

To be poor and under the rule of Lord Artemaigne was a desperate life, for the Krytarins had always had a tradition of outdoing their predecessors. Each one was more barbaric than the last, and Artemaigne intended to be remembered as the worst of them all. Being rich under his rule, however, was another matter entirely. Artemaigne was always very careful to ensure his good relations with the aristocracy, both within his kingdom and beyond it, hence the banquet he was holding this evening. He held these banquets every so often, and they were said to be marvellous spectacles: Artemaigne would treat his guests to a large variety of entertainment, although the entertainment often involved a helpless prisoner being tortured in some cruel and unusual manner. The food that was served was regarded as divine, but almost always was taken forcibly from his subjects, leaving them to starve. Tonight's banquet, as well as being the usual social occasion, served another, very important purpose — for tonight, Artemaigne announced his intention to begin his conquest of all the Angles, and the Celtic lands that lay at their northern and western borders.

As he stood at the balcony, pondering the upcoming event, his wife, the Lady Cyrella, joined him at his side. Although their marriage had been arranged to cement an alliance between their fathers, Artemaigne and Cyrella had found themselves very much in love, and their marriage had been very successful. And after they had assassinated their fathers, partly as a political ploy, but mostly for revenge (they had still forced them into an arranged marriage, after all), they had united the two kingdoms they respectively ruled, and created the foundations of the Krytarin Empire.

Cyrella stood next to her husband, her arms draped seductively over his left shoulder, observing the drills below them. She was just as ruthless as her husband, and had found that she very much approved of his ruling methods.

"The first guests should be arriving soon." Artemaigne muttered.

"Yes." Her voice was as smooth as honey, an attribute she had learned from her mother. "Would you like me to greet them, dearest?"

"I thought we might greet them together. It has been a long time since Lord Darrius has paid us a visit." He smiled. "And besides, it will give us an excuse to introduce them to our new friend." They both laughed sinisterly, and retreated into the room behind them to make preparations for the evening ahead.

* * *

><p>Back on Berk, night had fallen, and Hiccup finally recovered from his hangover. He woke up, bleary-eyed, took one look outside and groaned. Not in pain, the headaches had long gone, but rather due to the realisation that he had wasted an entire day due to a hangover.</p>

_So much for seeing to my chief's duties. _He thought, glumly, before slowly getting out of bed. The cold night breeze blew over his bare

chest, causing him to take in a sharp breath, shivering at the cool contact as his hairs stood on end. Thankfully, whoever had undressed him had left his leggings on, or he would be completely freezing right now.

He picked up his favourite old green tunic from the table next to his bed, ever amazed that it still fit him. Having said that, he noticed that it had become skin-tight since he was fifteen, and smoothly accentuated the muscle tone he had built up after five years of riding dragons. It was still comfortable, regardless.

Hiccup walked downstairs, looking to grab a bite to eat, and saw his beloved fiancée asleep in a chair, the same one she'd been sitting in two nights ago when she had told him she was pregnant. The thought brought a smile to his face; he still hadn't quite got used to the fact that he was going to be a father. Trying not to wake her, Hiccup helped himself to an apple that was just on the verge of over-ripening. With the onset of winter, the villagers were getting ready for the arrival of devastating winter. That meant bringing in harvests, stockpiling resources, and relying on the stores that they had carefully maintained over the many years. This strategy had ensured that the whole village survived and thrived on the island, despite the harsh winter climate.

It also meant no more fresh produce. There was no way that they could grow or acquire it during the depths of winter, not even with Trader Johann's help.

Or could we?"

Hiccup was suddenly hit by a bolt of inspiration. He would have to ask various people about his idea tomorrow, but if he was right, they could secure a source of fresh produce all year around. _How times change_, He thought.

Finishing his apple, he went over to Astrid, intending to carry her sleeping form up to their bed, but it turned out that she was only lightly napping, for as soon as he approached, Astrid's eyes blearily batted open.

"Hey there, sleepyhead." He laughed quietly at her.

"Look who's talking?" She retorted, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. "Just how long were you asleep today?"

"Oh, don't remind me." Hiccup sighed, still annoyed at himself. "Do remind me to ask Snotlout how he manages to avoid colossal hangovers. It's just not fair; he drank at least as much as I did, probably more. How does he do it? How do they _all_ do it, for that matter?" Astrid giggled quietly at her beloved's exasperation, before silencing him with a loving kiss.

"It's alright, Hiccup. We've all had hangovers before." She thought for a second. "True, never one quite as humungously epic as yours, but nonetheless!"

"Thanks, Astrid." He hugged her tightly to him, their eyes closed, as they just held each other, basking in their mutual warmth, a close comfort from the bitter cold.

"I can always rely on you to cheer me up." She just laughed, before they kissed again. This time, the kiss became more heated, until they were sensually locking their lips together, their hands wandering over the body of the other, finding and stimulating each other's erogenous zones with the deft touch that only true lovers can achieve. As they became more, enthusiastic, Hiccup gently lifted Astrid up and placed her on the table, leaning into their sustained kiss. His hands eventually found her skirt, and gently removed it, Astrid wiggling her hips to help slip it off, as her hands found his belt buckle and just as slowly undid his leggings. By unspoken agreement, they left their tunics well alone, the frigid evening being too cold for that level of intimacy.

Just as Astrid was getting comfortable on the table, Hiccup did something that took her by surprise; he grabbed her waist and deftly flipped her over, pushing her gently forward so that her stomach was flush with the wooden surface.

"Hiccup?" She asked, intrigued.

"Trust me." He smiled. Not his usual goofy smile, nor even his rare confident smile, but a roguish, almost sly half-smile that he reserved only for Astrid, and only when they were about to indulge in each other. She knew that it meant that he was planning something devious, and that whatever he had planned would result in her being fucked to the edge of delirium, sexy, blissful delirium. She smiled back, before getting comfortable on the table — she knew that she was going to be there for a while.

As she did, she felt Hiccup pull her boots off gently. Then, he pulled her leggings down, and then off. She purred in her throat as he kissed his way back up her inner thigh, his talented fingers working their usual magic, before he pulled her underwear down, but only to her knees. She bit her lower lip in anticipation — with her legs held together by her pants, she would be tighter than before she had lost her virginity, and with the size of Hiccup's member, he would probably end up carrying her to bed after all.

Hiccup placed one hand on Astrid's waist, using the other to guide his fully erect manhood into her entrance, which was thankfully already damp. He gently pushed the tip inside her folds, earning a lustful cry from Astrid, and slowly pushed forward, sheathing his entire length inside her. Astrid had her eyes tightly shut, biting hard on her lip, resisting the urge to tell him to speed up, the primal animal inside her that only surfaced during sexy times with Hiccup begging for the release that this agonisingly slow penetration promised. She gasped when he was fully inside her, as Hiccup reached around to kiss her neck.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" He quietly asked her. "I mean, this won't hurt the baby, will it?" Her heart melted, and it had nothing to do with the heat radiating from her hips. Even in this state, when he could have her howling to the moon until morning, he was still the most considerate and caring man she had ever met.

"I asked mom about it. I'm only six weeks pregnant, give or take a few days, so it should be fine." She kissed his cheek, before putting on a sly smile. "Besides, I want to get used to it. Mom also said this is the only comfortable position I might have closer to the time." Hiccup returned the smile.

"Anything for you, milady." He kissed her gently, before placing both hands around her waist and slowly drawing himself out, causing Astrid to start whimpering, her hands gripping the opposite side of the table tightly. As he pushed back in again, he found their natural rhythm, and gradually sped things up, until he was almost pounding himself into her. Astrid was lost in carnal bliss; she was sure that she was keeping the neighbours awake with the way she was howling and laughing intermittently, but she didn't care. She wanted the world to know just how damned magical her fiancÃ© felt inside her. She screamed as she came over his member, her orgasm sending pulsating waves of pleasure through her body. Hiccup himself was still a long way from being done, but at least her juices helped to lubricate his shaft, his repeated thrusting now pronounced with a distinctly lewd squishing sound, which quickly turned into a conspicuously loud sloshing sound, and an even louder Astrid, after her third or fourth orgasm. Finally, he felt the familiar tension of his own release, and also felt that Astrid was building up for a big one as well.

Somewhere in his life, Hiccup had mastered the art of sexual prowess, for a few carefully timed thrusts had them sharing their orgasms, her sexy, uncontrollable giggling contrasting his low growling, as his seed mixed with her juices, pulling out now a rather pointless exercise. As Astrid giggled her way down from her sexual high, riding out the last waves of her orgasm and uncontrollably shaking and jolting in reaction, Hiccup collapsed over her, using his arms to stop himself from crushing her. His still erect manhood was still inside her, connecting them both on a primal level that no one but true lovers could ever understand.

When they had recovered, Hiccup pulled himself out of her and cleaned himself and Astrid with a spare rag, almost giving her another orgasm when he touched her sensitive nether regions. He pulled his underwear and leggings on, before replacing Astrid's pants for her, and, just as Astrid had anticipated, he had to physically carry her to bed, her legs too weak for her to walk after the wild sex they had just had. Carrying her bridal style (perhaps a little ironically), her hands around his neck, her face beaming at him, they proceeded up the stairs, and went to bed as they were, partly because of the cold, but mostly because they couldn't take their eyes off each other. Eventually, they fell asleep in each other's arms, the light of the moon bathing their sleeping forms.

* * *

><p>Sitting on the rooftop across from them, a strange figure watched them sleep with a beatific smile. The figure wore a silver hooded cloak, with a quiver of silver arrows across its back, a silver-plated ash wood bow in one hand. As the figure stood, the cloak flapped behind the figure in the night breeze, and revealed that she was a young woman. She wore a long-sleeved night blue tunic, cut off above her navel, and laced together at the front. She wore a pair of metallic bracers on her forearms, each with spiralling patterns of moons and stars etched into them. Over her shins, a matching pair of greaves, with similar patterns, were clasped over dark blue leggings and black, knee-high leather boots, a silver front-split skirt playing around her legs in the wind.</p>

As if she had heard a hidden signal, she suddenly looked up, and then gracefully jumped off the roof onto the back of her own dragon, which immediately took flight, silently into the night sky. The dragon was

unlike any ever seen by the Vikings of Berk; it was about sixty feet long, with a wingspan almost half that again. It bore some resemblance to the Monstrous Nightmare, but that was the closest comparison that could be made. It had four legs, instead of two, each twice as thick around as the average Viking man's upper arm, except for the forelegs, which tapered outwards after the elbow and knee joints to become even wider, each leading to five dextrous claws, capable of picking up needles, slicing through trees or crushing whole rocks. The chest of the dragon extended to the size of three hogshead mead barrels, to accommodate the flight muscles, whereas the dragon's pelvis was no wider than six feet. The tail accounted for most of its length, its body being only twenty feet long. It had fins growing all the way down its back, starting just behind the shoulders, where the mysterious rider stood, at two inches tall, increasing in size to the three centre fins, each two feet long, and gradually tapering down to the base of the tail, which was largely free of them, except for two guiding tail fins at the very end. The dragon's head was rather pointed, with its skull tapering out from its nose. It had two pairs of eyes, one large pair situated on either side of its head, pointing forward, and a much smaller pair that pointed out to the side and back, granting the dragon excellent peripheral vision. The head ended in a magnificent crest, with a crown of small spines growing out of it, and two large horns flowing out of the top of its skull.

This dragon was a magnificent specimen, even among its own species, and it was obviously affectionate towards its rider, an affection returned as she scratched his neck as they flew. The secretive pair flew for over an hour, until they finally landed in a clearing on another island, shrouded in mist, the rocks plunging out of the water all around its high cliffs proving it too dangerous to approach by sea. A figure was standing in the clearing, and his attire showed that nothing was as it seemed with these two. The man standing there was wearing a woollen overcoat, it's stitching, and the precisely sewn pockets it had, along with the brass buttons on one side, evidence that it had been made by far better craftsmen than any alive in the world at that time. Beneath the coat, he wore a white shirt, with a red cravat, and a blue waistcoat, with a steel watch-chain hanging from one pocket. The black cargo trousers he wore, and the pristine leather boots beneath them, were all items out of time and place.

The figure glanced at his pocket watch, then looked up as he heard his companion approach. He smiled, snapping the watch shut as he put it away, and walked over to greet the young woman.

"I assume all goes well at Berk, Agent Artemis?" He had one of those accents that could actually enunciate capital letters.

"Brilliantly." The woman replied, her accent somewhere between Greek and English. "It seems that pointing Traask in his nephew's direction was a sound move."

"But of course." The man stared at his watch again. "When time itself is your enemy, you are compelled to think very, very hard on your decisions." He noticed her stroking the dragon's head. "I see you have bonded well to Odysseus."

"He's wonderful!" She laughed, as Odysseus rubbed his head into her

chest affectionately. Her companion smiled.

"If we succeed, there may be many more like him for future generations to enjoy. The Draigr Rouge are a quite magnificent species, even amongst dragons." He reached up to stroke Odysseus' snout gently. "How soon do you think we can be ready?"

"Not for a while yet, Agent Daedalus." Artemis answered. "What you have planned is a very risky move. It must be treated with extreme delicacy." She pulled back the hood on her cloak, revealing her face. Her hair was jet black, and fell down in a long braid over her shoulder. Her skin showed she was Mediterranean in origin, and her eyes were a soft golden colour. "Do you really think it can be done?"

"We must at least try, my dear." Daedalus answered softly. "Failure means the end of our civilisation." He looked straight at her, his piercing blue eyes betraying a deep concern. "If we cannot save the dragons, then humanity will also be equally doomed to extinction."

10. Lost to the Mists of Time

Greetings, dear readers, as we arrive at chapter 10, were we see the extent of Artemaigne's evil machinations, Astrid and Hiccup share a very important day, and the nature of the disaster that causes the end of human civilization is finally revealed. This is also officially the longest story I have ever written on FanFiction! (Cue fireworks)

Thanks as ever to my reviewers; Backlash 42, madeline . kallis, GwynCanGirl0203, Remedy's Melody 109, CherryPika91, Aniwfogirl, Riverat73, thedragon 1010 and Lightfury.

DISCLAIMER: The HTTYD series belongs to Cressida Cowell and Dreamworks Animation. On a totally unrelated note, my experiments into the genetic construction of an actual dragon have failed miserably, so unfortunately there will be no baby Furies from Santa this Christmas/Snoggletog. Sorry about that.

* * *

><p>Lost to the Mists of Time

Whilst Daedalus and Artemis were philosophically discussing the fate of humanity minus the dragons, a fellow agent of theirs was infiltrating Artemaigne's dark citadel. None of the agents used their real names, and some of them had used their pseudonyms for so long that they had forgotten their real names. To the world at large, he was known as Dr. Phillip Monroe. Where had picked up that pseudonym from he couldn't remember for the life of him, but there it was. He was called Dr. Phillip Monroe, and considering the microscopic life expectancy of people in his line of work, it was very likely the name he would die with.

As an expert infiltrator, he had been assigned the particularly dangerous assignment of infiltrating Dolorous Garde, the black citadel that played host to Lord Artemaigne. They knew that Artemaigne was the focal point of the disaster that would eventually

doom their species to slow extinction, and they had made several educated guesses that all suggested that the ball he was hosting this evening was the point in time when the series of events they were here to stop had been set in motion. Hence, why Dr. Monroe was perched on a rafter, looking down at the festivities below.

The party had been in full swing for a while now, when a servant called for silence to allow Artemaigne himself to speak. There was polite applause as he rose from his chair, graciously acknowledging his guests as he moved to the centre of the room. He wore an assured smile as silence descended, but Phillip saw right through that; he knew that he was about to witness the Fall, the event that began their demise, and so paid close attention.

"My dear friends," Artemaigne said, his voice as soft as silk, but with all the charm of a snake. "Tonight we stand on the crux of a new era in our history. As many of you well know, I have been preparing to conquer the rest of the Angles, as well as the uncivilised lands to the north and west of our fair kingdoms. Now, I am happy to announce that the time of conquest is upon us, for my soldiers stand ready to begin their glorious campaign and rid us of the Celtic barbarians once and for all!" A cheer resounded around the room.

He can captivate a crowd, I'll give him that. Phillip thought. Artemaigne signalled for silence once more.

"None of this would have been possible without your loyal support, and when I am king of all the Angles, you shall have your share of power, as you will be the lords and ladies of the cities and counties that will form our great empire. For it is an empire now. A short while ago, my vision was restricted to ridding our lands of the unwashed barbarian filth that contaminates our borders, and making this land whole under my rule. Our rule." He paused then, and the expression he wore was one that suggested that he had found a great secret, and that with it, the world would be his. "But imagine, if you will, that our domain does not have to stop there, that we can extend our power to the European nations, to Scandinavia and the Urals, even Asia and Africa!" He saw the looks of disbelief being shared among his guests. "I know, I know, even I didn't believe it at first, but then I made a new friend, a new ally, one who showed me power beyond my wildest dreams. Of course, I simply thought he was after a slice of the power we are about to gain, but no! Only revenge drives him, and that makes him a man after my own heart." The audience laughed, appreciating the dark humour. "I have been told that in the northernmost parts of Scandinavia, there are tribes of Vikings, no less, who have mastered the skill of taming and riding dragons. The menaces that stalk our land are their most trustworthy allies, it would seem. Who are we, the civilised people of the Angles, to be outdone by Viking marauders?" A murmur of assent ran through the crowd. "No longer will we have to bare such shame, however, for now we have that skill. We have among us a man who can show us this power!" Artemaigne turned to the door, and as if on cue, the guards opened the heavy oak doors, and in walked a man that Phillip really did not want to see. For into the hall walked a man the size of a bear, with black dreadlocks, one arm missing, and wearing a cloak of black dragon skin. "My dear friends, let me introduce you to my new ally, our own dragon conqueror, Drago Bludfist!"

><p>Three Weeks Later

Hiccup looked in the mirror, and the face that stared back at him did not inspire him with confidence. It looked like an unfortunate combination of fear, Dutch courage and foolish pride, and gave off the unshakable air that it might, suddenly and without warning, scream loudly and collapse to the floor, gibbering and foaming at the mouth.

Hiccup laughed nervously. Valka had warned him this might happen, and also told him that he need not worry, that it was perfectly natural for him to feel like this.

He licked his hand and smoothed his hair back, taking a deep breath to calm himself. Luckily for him, it worked. He walked over to the door and stepped out of the cabin he was currently occupying on the Artemis. As he walked down the corridor, people he passed bid him congratulations, which he thanked them for with a nervous smile. Finally, he arrived at the cargo bay and disembarked down the loading ramp, where Gobber, Valka and Toothless were waiting for him. As he set foot on the ground, Toothless bounded over to him in excitement, nuzzling his head against Hiccup's chest. He laughed, hugging his best friend's head, secretly glad that Toothless had enough self-control to not start licking his ceremonial uniform. Gobber walked up to him, and place his hand on Hiccup's shoulder.

"You ready?" He asked gently.

"As ready as I'll ever be, I guess." Hiccup laughed nervously. Gobber simply smiled and squeezed his shoulder in encouragement. Hiccup scratched Toothless behind the ears, causing him to purr happily in his throat. "You'd better get going bud." Toothless warbled in agreement, before he turned and flew back towards their house. Hiccup watched him go, then turned to his mother, who was barely holding back a flood of tears. Hiccup reached his arms around her and pulled her into an affectionate hug.

"So," He said. "Today's the day."

"Yes, it is." Valka smiled back. "I only wish that your father were here to see it."

"He is, mom." Hiccup answered, before pressing his hand over her heart. "In here." He smiled, before hugging her again. They held each other, mother and son, until Gobber tapped him on the shoulder.

"It's time, Hiccup." He let go of Valka, and took a deep breath, before squaring his shoulders and walking through the village, his cloak billowing in the gentle winter breeze. He headed for the Meade Hall, taking care to avoid passing by his house, which was now a hive of activity. When he got there, a crowd was already beginning to form, but other than the odd congratulation, they largely ignored him. As he entered, Gobber hobbling along behind him, he saw that the preparations had been made; a feast had been laid out on the tables near the back, and the area in front of the fire had been cleared to form a makeshift dais, which Hiccup stood up on to wait. There, waiting for him, was Gothi, who simply smiled an encouragement at him. He smiled back, and then began the longest wait of his life, for

today was the day that he and Astrid were finally going to become husband and wife. Today, they were going to be married.

Meanwhile, back at their house, Astrid was equally nervous, though she had a better way to hide it, for she was also ecstatically happy, and didn't care who knew. She looked at herself in the mirror for the fourteenth time that morning. Astrid had chosen to wear a simple blue dress that had once been her mother's, but now fit her perfectly. It hugged her body in all the right places, and Astrid was relieved that her pregnancy didn't really show yet. As well as the dress, she was wearing a silver girdle around her waist that was patterned to look like a leaf-laden branch, continuously weaving around in an endless circle, and her best, and softest, white fur boots, the cold weather making any other footwear impractical. She had let her hair flow free, instead of the usual braid she wore it in, and over it she wore a beautiful gold tiara, with an emerald sitting proudly in the centrepiece. Over her shoulders she had draped a wide white fur scarf, to keep the cold at bay. All in all, Astrid had never looked so beautiful, mostly because she never really tried. She wasn't the type of girl that really cared about her image, and Hiccup had assured her on many an occasion that she would never need to, that she shouldn't try to hide her stunning natural beauty, as he called it. But today was their wedding, so she had to at least try, and damn had she tried.

Her father walked into the mirror's frame beside her, a proud and happy smile adorning his usually rough features.

"You look beautiful, Astrid." He smiled at her. Astrid leaned into her father's arms, something she had found comforting ever since she was a child. "And never forget, that I am so proud of you. You deserve this day, Astrid."

"Thanks, dad." She smiled up at him, before he wrapped his arms around her in a tender hug.

"Now, then, I think we had better get you to the Hall." Finn opened the door for Astrid, who stepped outside to see Magnus, Toothless and Stormfly waiting expectantly. And although this was undoubtedly going to be the happiest day of her life, there was still a hole in her heart where her mother should have been. The day after they had announced their engagement, her mother had caught the pox, and never recovered. It was still raw, but she was determined to be happy, for her mother if no one else. As she walked towards the two, Magnus smiled happily at his sister, as she beamed back at him. When she reached Stormfly, she scratched her gently behind the ears. She cawed in delight, before crouching down, allowing her to climb up on her back, riding side saddle so as to preserve her dignity whilst riding with the dress she wore. Finn followed her out and took his place to the left of Stormfly, Magnus to the right, with Toothless flying above and together, the five of them made their way to the Meade Hall.

When Hiccup watched them enter, he almost forgot to breathe. To him, Astrid looked like a goddess, utterly resplendent in that smooth blue dress, the tiara making her look like royalty. Finn and Magnus were waiting at the side of the dais, not really wanting to interfere with the ceremony.

As Stormfly reached the dais, she knelt down to let Astrid dismount,

whilst Toothless walked up to stand behind Hiccup. As he did, they momentarily glanced at each other, communicating their shared gratitude at having each other for their best friend. Then Hiccup turned to Astrid, their smiles so broad that, considering the festivities that had been set up, they might as well have finally succeeded in triggering the early onset of Snoggletog. Hiccup took her hands, squeezing them for reassurance, and then they turned to Gobber, who was conducting the ceremony as a translator for Gothi. He smiled proudly at Hiccup, before he cleared his throat and began.

"Friends, brothers and sisters and fellow Vikings, we are gathered here to witness the union of our chief, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, to this woman, Astrid Hofferson, in the most sacred bond of matrimony. If there are any here who have good cause or reason to believe that these two should not be wed, speak now and forever hold your peace." The silence was so profound that even the dragons stopped breathing. "Thank the gods for that." Gobber muttered. "Seems I didn't need this after all." He gestured to the mace head that was his current left hand, and the entire hall laughed jovially until he gestured for silence. "Hiccup, do you take this woman, Astrid, to be your wife, to love and protect her forever, in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, until death do you part?"

"I do." He smiled at Astrid, who looked like she was barely holding back her excitement.

"Astrid, do you take this man, Hiccup, to be your husband, to love and protect him forever, in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, until death do you part?"

"I do." She squeezed his hands, as he looked to be on the verge of tears.

"Then present your rings of unity to your partner, as symbols of your eternal love for each other." Astrid went first, Magnus handing her a simple ring made of platinum, one of a pair that Hiccup had made for the occasion, which she placed onto the ring finger of his left hand. Hiccup then turned to Fishlegs, who handed him an identical ring, which he then placed on the ring finger of her right hand, before kissing it affectionately.

Then, they held their ringed hands together, and kneeled down in front of Gothi, who stepped forward with a strip of gold cloth in her hands, with which she gently tied their hands together, before they stood facing each other again.

"By the authority invested in me, and on behalf of the village Elder, I now pronounce you husband and wife. Hiccup, you may kiss the bride." Holding their tied hands outwards from each other, Hiccup used his free hand to pull his wife close to him and gently kissed her, as the assembled crowd finally let loose the cheers they had been holding back for the entire ceremony. When they separated, she smiled at him, before saying, "I love you, Mr. Haddock.".

"I love you, Mrs. Haddock." He proudly replied, before they hugged each other tightly. They were interrupted when Toothless eagerly nudged at Hiccup's back, before kneeling down again. The couple

laughed, before Hiccup picked Astrid up off her feet as best they could with their hands tied and carried her onto Toothless' back. As he stood up, he roared jubilantly, before taking flight and carrying them out of the Meade Hall and straight into the sky above Berk, where Stormfly was eagerly waiting for them with Hookfang, Meatlug, Barf & Belch, Skullcrusher and Cloudjumper, and as Toothless circled above the village, the dragons formed their own guard of honour, for their chief and their alpha.

Astrid settled herself into Hiccup's lap, their hands held out in front of them, and laid back into his shoulder, as Hiccup rested his head on hers, letting Toothless do all the flying for once. And as they flew above their home in a comfortable silence, they knew that they would never forget this moment, not for as long as they lived.

11. Lost to the Mists of Time, Part II

Greetings, dear readers, and welcome to chapter eleven! Where we see our heroes in new and unfamiliar lands, Hiccup's sexual ingenuity, the discovery of dragonese from unexpected sources, the elements of command, endless, endless mysticism and somehow improving on the greatest friendship in all of human history.

I am so, so sorry that it has taken this long to update. I have been afflicted by significant lack of internets, and my creative juices have suffered considerably for it. There is much sex in this chapter, so that makes up for it, right?

* * *

><p>Lost to the Mists of Time, Part II

Three weeks after Hiccup and Astrid's wedding, somewhere off the coast of Italy.

Hiccup inhaled deeply, breathing in the fresh Mediterranean air, the wind blowing his unruly hair in all directions. Back in Berk, devastating winter had already set in, but according to Traask, they never had that this far south. Hiccup couldn't quite believe his eyes, though it was November, fast approaching the deepest depths of winter, and here was a place that didn't even have snow, for gods' sake. Hiccup had considered himself quite the explorer after he had discovered the advent of dragon riding, but compared to this, he was an amateur.

About six weeks ago, he had had the revelation that, with the help of Traask and his airship, the Artemis, Berk could sustain a supply of fresh food all year around. The Artemis could simply fly to warmer climes, barter with the locals of some town or village, or even one of the major cities, and then bring the bartered goods back to Berk. So long as the Artemis wasn't grounded by a storm, they could do this continually throughout winter. When he had approached Traask with the idea, he initially thought that his nephew was joking, but after Hiccup had explained it to him properly, Traask realised the potential.

And so, here they were, testing out their grand scheme, and so far it had worked. Hiccup was standing on the upper gantry, the highest of

three platforms that ran the length of the airship's balloon, holding onto the guard-rail and soaking up the view of the beautiful Italian countryside, their destination — a small fishing village that Traask had visited a few years ago — a half hour away.

Hiccup had been loath to leave Astrid behind, but he wanted to be on the first run, to make sure it all went smoothly, and Astrid's pregnancy meant that she couldn't really travel with them — or rather, Valka and Gobber had refused to let her travel with him. The upside to all this was that he got to spend some quality time with Fishlegs, something he was in dire need of, having neglected his best childhood friend in recent weeks with all that had happened. As Hiccup watched the beautiful Italian coastal scenery roll by, the wheel on the nearby door was turned from the inside, and through the unlocked portal stepped Fishlegs himself.

"Hey, Hiccup!" Fishlegs cheerily greeted his friend.

"Hey, Fishlegs. Come to enjoy the view?"

"Wow!" Fishlegs stood in awe, neither of them having ever seen such stunning vistas before. "It seems that the world is an awful lot bigger than we thought."

"Yep. And I thought just extensively mapping the farthest reaches of the Barbaric Archipelago made me an explorer." They both laughed heartily, something that they had not done in nearly long enough, before resting their arms on the guardrail.

"So, Hiccup," Fishlegs began. "How are you finding married life?"

"Well, so far, I managed to father a child before my wedding day, spent most of my time integrating the crew into Berkian society, and then ran off two weeks later on some grand air voyage into the unknown." Hiccup then smiled. "But, apart from that, it is utterly magnificent." He looked over at Fishlegs. "Why do you ask? Got a secret girlfriend I don't know about that you're thinking of getting serious with?"

"Hmph, if only!" Fishlegs muttered. "I couldn't even get Ruffnut to pay attention to me."

"To be fair, I would imagine that having the overbearing attention of two enthusiastic suitors at once would definitely have put me off both of them."

"True." Fishlegs conceded Hiccup's point. "At least she's not still lolling over Eret."

"No, indeed." He gave Fishlegs a conspiratorial look. "You know, Legs, she is here with us, all alone, and probably feeling quite lonely, seeing as we had to leave Tuffnut behind to look after Barf & Belch while they're ill. Without Snotlout being his usual obnoxious self, I rather fancy your chances." Fishlegs smiled, acknowledging his friends attempt to cheer him on.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Hiccup, but I think the key to Ruffnut's heart is one enigma I'm done trying to solve."

"Oh, come on Fishlegs! You never know until you try."

"I did try, Hiccup. How do you think I got this?" He raised his left hand, which Hiccup now noticed had been rather heavily bandaged, and looked to be at an angle that considerably different to what Hiccup would have considered a healthy one.

"Ok, I guess that answers that."

"So, now that I know about your love life, how's things going as chief?"

Hiccup groaned loudly, burying his face in his folded arms.

"Fishlegs, you do not want to know how difficult it is being chief." He lifted his head and began enthusiastically gesturing with his hands, a mannerism that only showed itself when Hiccup was truly agitated or frustrated, usually both. "I mean, I used to look after dragons. You'd think that looking after a village of Vikings would be a step down for me, but no! Never before, in all of my life, have I ever had to do such a difficult job!" He took a deep breath, before ploughing on with his monologue ranting. "You would think that living in the same village all of their lives would make them get along just fine, but you try resolving an argument between Spitelout Jorgenson, Snotlout Jorgenson and Tuffnut Thorsten over whose week it is to have their shared half of the yak! Honestly, Fishlegs," He looked at his friend, who was apparently paying him no attention. "Being chief is harder than it looks. I mean, even my best friend appears to have trouble listening to me, and what exactly is that thing you're looking at?" Hiccup squinted into the sky, noticing the commotion that had attracted Fishlegs' attention. As he looked closer, he realised that it was actually a group of dragons locked in mortal combat. And the attackers were armoured in a very familiar fashion.

"Hiccup!"

"I see it too, Fishlegs." Hiccup said, realising who they were. "They must be some of the last remnants of Drago's army! Sound the alarm! I'll meet you on the flight deck - "

"No, Hiccup, not that!" Fishlegs said, alarmed. "I recognise the other dragons. Hiccup, that's Thornado!"

* * *

><p>Traask was writing in his log, a habit he had forced himself into. Although the Officers of the Watch and his First Officer, a German woman named Eva von Kritzchen, kept the official ships logs, he had taken to writing up his own captain's log, primarily as a means of organising his thoughts. He was currently summing up the condition of the supplies they had brought to barter, and what he hoped they would get in trade, when he heard the alarm klaxon in his quarters go off. The alarm meant one of two things â€“ first, the Artemis was under direct attack, and second, Drago's forces were coming.</p>

He was just about to rush out of his quarters when Hiccup came barging in.

"Traask, you've gotta come quickly!" Hiccup shouted, out of breath from running all the way here.

"Slow down, Hiccup. What's happening?"

"It's Drago's men. A small group are attacking on armoured dragons."

"Godsdammit! I knew they were brave to the point of foolhardy, but to openly attack an airship!"

"No, Traask, that's not it. We're not the target."

"Then who is?!"

"An old friend of ours, Thornado."

"What the hell kind of name is Thornado?"

"The name of my father's first dragon." Traask did a double-take, then realised the importance of the situation. He went over to his desk, and picked up a strange metallic horn off its stand, before flipping a switch marked 'Hangar Bay' and winding the handle of the box it was attached to. A second later, the voice of the hangar marshal came through the circular wire mesh mounted above it.

"This is Krayst."

"Quinn, launch all dragons for immediate aerial combat. A wild dragon is under attack by remnants of Drago's forces. I repeat, deploy all dragons, on the double!"

"Aye, aye, captain." The hangar marshal dropped the connection, before his voice came over the airships PA system. "All riders to the hangar bay immediately, priority one has been declared! I repeat all riders to the hangar bay!" Immediately, Hiccup and Traask could hear the rush of everyone in the corridors.

"We should join them too." Hiccup said.

"No, Hiccup." Traask corrected him. "You should join them. There are three rules you need to know about being a captain: one, always keep your shirt tucked in; two, always go down with the ship; and three, leave no crewmember behind. The Artemis needs her captain, and those hatchlings need one parent to stay alive for them." Hiccup nodded, conceding Traask's point.

"Okay." He gave his uncle his usual half-smile. "I'll just have to claim all your glory for you."

"The hell you will!" Traask laughed. "You forget, we already have the broadside cannons in range and pointing in the right direction."

"Then make sure you don't hit us!" Hiccup called back as he rushed for the door.

"No promises!" Traask called after him. "Happy hunting!"

* * *

><p>When Hiccup was in position, with Fishlegs and Meatlug hovering beside him, he expected this to be the usual type of skirmish that they had come to know and love. He had failed, however, to account for the fact that the Artemis' hangar bay had fifty dragons housed within its walls, and all of them, and their riders, had been trained for combat. At a cursory glance, Hiccup could see Monstrous Nightmares, Zipplebacks, a couple of Stormcutters, a few Gronckles, a whole squad of Rumblehorns and even what he thought to be a Skrill.</p>

I almost feel sorry for the enemy riders, he thought to himself. Almost. In the absence of both Tuffnut and Barf & Belch, Ruffnut had joined Hiccup and Toothless, sitting back to back with her chief, a portable ballista attached to Toothless' saddle, ready to act as rear gunner to any enemies who might try to flank them. The Stormcutters and Rumblehorns had larger versions attached to them, and their fore riders were also armed with longbows. Flaming longbows.

As Hiccup saw the Artemis' armoured shutters descend and her cannons begin to poke out through the balloon's skin, he turned to check on his co-pilot.

"You okay back there, Ruff?" He asked her, his voice muffled by his flight mask. In response, Ruffnut armed the ballista, pulling back the taught cords and priming the missile that lay waiting, also a fire arrow.

"Can't wait." She chuckled, excited at the prospect of anticipated chaos. "Never flown shotgun like this before. Should be a fun experience. You're definitely a step up or five from flying with Tuffnut."

"Thanks, I think."

"Don't worry, those Thunderdrums aren't gonna get away from me!"

"Wait, no! Don't shoot the Thunderdrums! We're here to protect them!"

"Okay! Then who do we shoot?" Hiccup pointed at the skirmisher band, and Ruffnut smiled darkly when she saw her actual target.

"Then what are we waiting for?!" She yelled.

"Alright!" Hiccup signalled to the assembled riders. "Those dragon riders are some of the remnants of Drago's army. We don't know how they learned to fly the armoured dragons, but we'd sure as hell like to find out, so try to capture some of them alive if possible. Our primary objective is to get them away from those Thunderdrums. Their leader is called Thornado, and he's a very old friend, so if he dies, I will personally find the person responsible and throw them off the airship. Before we land!"

"Hey, Hiccup, I'm liking the new you!" Ruffnut smiled at him, which made Fishlegs pout a little.

"When we commence the attack, we will attempt to drive them away from the Thunderdrums, and then the Artemis will open fire on the group in an attempt to scatter and rout them. Then, we go in for the kill and try to capture as many of the riders as possible. Let the dragons go if you can. Everybody got that?" There were calls of assent from the riders. "In that case," He dropped his visor. "Let's fly!" With a cheer, they flew into a V formation, Toothless leading the charge.

They outnumbered them about five to one, so Hiccup was confident in his victory. It was as they began to descend upon the squad that Hiccup noticed something drop from the clouds — a very big something. As he looked up, his heart almost stopped in his chest, for there in front of them was another Red Death. And when he saw who was riding it, he realised that he had made a fatal tactical error. They had fallen into a trap. The enemy riders weren't Drago's men, not any more at any rate, but were in fact Berserkers.

"Hiccup?!" Fishlegs almost screamed.

"I see him!" Hiccup called back. "It's Dagur!"

* * *

><p>Back on Berk, Astrid was sitting in the rocking chair, staring out of the window, the ambient rays of the winter sun beaming down upon her face, and she was unhappy. Hiccup had been gone for a week now, and she wasn't expecting him back for at least another week and a half. The next time his uncle left with that infernal airship of his, she decided, Hiccup was either staying here or taking her with him.</p>

Astrid missed him dearly; the way that his happy smile would lift her heart, his goofy smile would make her laugh, his sexy smile would set her face, and loins, on fire; the way they would snuggle up besides the fire, and share those deep long passionate kisses that would invariably lead to being a bit more passionate in a whole load of other places; and especially the way that Hiccup would give her the biggest sexual releases ever just by being, well, himself. Astrid wasn't really surprised that all of her thoughts led back to sexy times with Hiccup — she was something of a nymphomaniac when it came to her husband, and he had a likewise situation when it came to her.

As she thought about her Hiccup, her hand crept beneath the hem of her leggings (she had already abandoned the skirt — spiked skirts and pregnancy just didn't seem like a good combination, even to her), into her pants and down towards the top of her sensitive folds. She found her target — the sensitive bud at the top of her womanhood — and began to gently rub the tip of her middle finger in tiny circles, sending a cascade of electrifying sensations through her body.

She smiled at the feeling, and decided to try out something that Hiccup had made for her. Astrid got up, locked the door and went upstairs to their bedroom. Our bedroom, she revelled in the thought. It thrilled her a little bit to think that they now shared a bed. Officially, anyway. She stripped off her leggings and underwear, and then closed the shutters before slipping her tunic over her head, until she was left standing in just the cloth band that kept her

breasts in place.

Astrid looked at herself in the mirror, turning sideways to check out her profile, and was somewhat glad to see that her stomach had become just a little larger. She rubbed her belly, smiling, wondering what their child would be like.

I hope it's a girl, she thought. That way, I can teach her to be the strong, confident woman I am, like any true Hofferson sorry, Haddock now s and Hiccup can completely adore her, dote on her forever and spoil her rotten. She giggled to herself at the image of Hiccup with their potential future daughter, giving her all the love and care she could ever hope for, and then some. The thought of Hiccup also caused that hot, deliciously aching need to return again, so Astrid padded over to the chest of drawers, opened the one on the top left and took out all the clothes inside. Then, she reached her hand in and clicked open the secret compartment beneath it, and took out the object in question.

Hiccup knew Astrid like he knew himself, and Astrid knew Hiccup even better. When he had told her that he was leaving, and that Valka and Gobber had threatened to find a new chief if he tried to take her with him, and understanding his wife's nympho tendencies, he had lovingly made her something to help, ahem, relieve her urges. At first glance, it was a simple granite effigy. It would have looked completely innocuous amongst the average contents of the average Viking household. But the discrete contours, the perfectly placed bumps and ridges and the general shape and size were all specifically detailed to ensure that Astrid would get maximum stimulation from it.

Astrid hadn't used it yet, truth be told, having gotten by with using her dextrous fingers to calm her needs. But today, she was particularly stressed out. Barf & Belch had taken a turn for the worse, which had rather stressed out Tuffnut, despite his surprising keenness for dragon, and human, medicine, Stormfly was currently laying her eggs, a process which turned out to be rather uncomfortable for Nadders, although not nearly as bad as human childbirth would be (Small comfort, Astrid had thought glumly), and to top it all off, Astrid had had her first encounter with the dreaded morning sickness. So yeah, she was extra stressed today, and found the prospect of, what was it Hiccup had said, being taken to the very hights of sexual pleasure, heights even I may not be able to reach, particularly appealing right now.

Astrid laid down on the bed, and placed her left hand between her legs, stimulating her clit with the tip of her middle finger again. She very quickly became moist, something that Hiccup had warned her to ensure she did before trying out theâ€¦ whatever it was called. Hiccup had never given it a name. She'd have to think of one. When she was sufficiently wet, she sifted through her memories of sex with Hiccup, trying to conjure up a good fantasy, and immediately rested on their wedding night.

Oh boy, that night had been fun. After the dragons had parted ways, Toothless carried on flying to the island of Itchy Armpit (they really needed to change that name) and when they had stepped off, Toothless flew off into the sunset, and they had had the whole night to themselves.

Smiling sultrily, Astrid placed the tip of the object to her entrance, levelled it to the right angle, and then "Hiccup and Astrid were laid out on the cot in the hut that Hiccup had obviously built, probably for this very night, both of them without a thread on them. They had been at it like dragons since well before their marriage, but this time was special. They weren't boyfriend and girlfriend, partners, or even an engaged couple anymore. They were married, and that meant something special to them both. "

"Hiccup's eyes burned with an emerald fire, as her deep blue orbs shimmered with the love they both shared for each other. He leaned forward and kissed her chastely on the lips; she held each other there, gently biting the lips of the other affectionately. He raised his hips slightly, and gently pressed his erect member into her; she smiled giddily, gasping as he slowly sheathed his full length inside of her, still maintaining the gentle kiss. When he was fully inside of her, he just as slowly drew back, tantalising her with the promise of powerful release. But, instead of accelerating his pace to the point of turning her into a banshee, he kept up (or down, depending on your point of view) the slow pace, savouring every second. Her core turned to liquid dragonfire, her heart and mind melting under the beautiful, divine passion that they were sharing. He gently stroked into her; in, out, in, out, her own fluids lubricating him so that he literally glided in and out of her. This slow lovemaking was very much a departure from their usual antics, but she loved it more than anything else they had done. Before now, they had been looking for sweet release, as noisily and as wildly as they could, but this, this felt to Astrid what it must feel like to be a sexual goddess. Every cell in her body begged him to never stop, but equally they screamed at him to tip her over the edge."

"Beneath the shimmering bands of the Northern Lights, as Traask had called it, they connected on a deeper level than ever before, and in perfect synchronous harmony, they both went over the edge, and soared together as their bodies were racked by wave after wave of sheer, unadulterated pleasure. Astrid " snapped open her eyes as her body involuntarily shook and her back arched, and she silently rode out her orgasm. Her clit had turned into a fountain of her fluids, and the bed sheets were soon ruined, in the best possible way. After five minutes of the most ecstatic pleasure she had ever experienced, on her own anyway, she calmed down, taking deep breaths, before slowly climbing onto unsteady legs.

"Wow!" She whispered to herself. "I have definitely found the right man!"

She looked through the gaps in the shutters and saw that it had turned to dusk. "Damn", she thought. "This thing is great!"

After she had recovered, she got dressed, replaced her new best friend back in its hiding place, and went downstairs to get herself a bite to eat " even imaginary love-making on that scale made her work up an appetite. After wolfing down a bowl of the chicken stew that had been slowly cooking over the fire all afternoon, she left the house, walking tenderly on her still unsteady legs. She went slowly through the village, trying to move her hips as gently as possible " her nether regions were so tender, that even the movement of the cloth of her underwear threatened to have her loins exploding in the middle of the street.

When she finally arrived at the stables that Stormfly and Typhoon were using to house their eggs, she opened the large doors and made her way through the cacophony of sleeping dragons, until she found her real best friend, sitting around a clutch of spiky purple eggs. Valka was sitting nearby, resting her head against Cloudjumper's sleeping body. She smiled when she saw her daughter-in-law approach.

"How is she?" Astrid asked quietly, trying not to disturb the snoozing reptiles all around her.

"She's fine, dear, and has a healthy clutch of seven eggs." Valka murmured, also trying to be quiet. "Typhoon's gone to catch some fish. It usually means the eggs will hatch soon."

"How long do they brood the eggs for normally?"

"That depends a lot on the individual dragons." Valka explained. "You see, once a dragon has laid a clutch, they can either care for the eggs and the subsequent hatchlings themselves, or they can abandon them for some time, either to return later or in the hope that another dragon will find and raise them."

"But, how does that work?" Astrid asked.

"The eggs won't hatch until they receive the proper cues from outside sources to do so." As she spoke, Stormfly reached over and breathed a jet of fire into the base of the hollow that the eggs were nestled in. The surrounding rocks quickly heated, causing the eggs to glow brightly. "The parents will only allow the eggs to hatch at the ideal time, when there's enough food to sustain all the hatchlings. When they judge that the time is right, they expose the eggs to intense heat. When the hatchlings inside sense that a sufficient level of heat is present, they'll eat up all the yolk sustaining them, and then hatch."

"Wow, that's actually pretty clever." Astrid nodded appreciatively.

"It is, yes. The actual period of time that dragons gestate the eggs inside their bodies vary between species. For Nadders, it's usually a few weeks, Gronckles about nine days, and Night Furies, Skrill and other Strike class dragons can gestate their eggs within 48 hours if need be."

"That's incredible!"

"Aye, it is." Valka agreed. "Dragons are the most amazing creatures I've ever seen. This may sound ridiculous to you, but after observing them for twenty years, I can only conclude that they are at least as intelligent as we are. Dragons aren't just dumb animals, Astrid. They're a people all of their own." Astrid nodded, sensing the wisdom of Valka's words. In the five years she had ridden Stormfly, she had never once doubted the rapacious intelligence of her best friend. It also explained why the dragons had such diverse personalities, and why they had so quickly befriended the Vikings the moment they had stopped killing each other.

"Valka's right, you know." A voice came from behind them. The two women turned to see Mildew standing there. "Dragons aren't just

mindless beasts. They're a whole civilisation. Think about it: the moment we stopped fighting them, and freed them from the Red Death, they immediately came to befriend us, just as we befriended them. Not the behaviour of wild beasts, I think you'll find. They have their own society, their own language, even."

"Their own language?" Valka gave him a doubtful look. "I know dragons are much more than they appear to be, but a language? Come on, Mildew."

"You mean to say that the great vigilante Dragon Rider hasn't noticed it?" Mildew laughed. "Come here." He gestured to the two women to follow him, and they did, their curiosity piqued. "See that Nightmare over there, the one next to the purple Zippleback?" They both followed his pointing finger, and saw the dragons in question. They seemed to be performing some sort of random ritual, with various gestures and expressions.

"What about them?" Astrid asked, still not seeing it.

"Look closely." She looked at the dragons for a minute, and then began to see it. What she had long assumed to be just random chattering and gesturing, she could now see had some sort of pattern to it. Mildew was right — they really were talking to each other.

"I'll bet you anything that Hiccup has lost a few nights sleep trying to interpret all that." Mildew laughed. Typhoon saw his rider, and quickly hopped over to have his neck scratched, purring deep in his throat as he did so. "If there's one thing I've learned, is that you should never have expectations around dragons."

"How do you mean, Mildew?" Valka asked him, a quizzical expression adorning her features.

"I mean, that dragons will never cease to amaze you." The three of them turned at the sound of eggshell cracking, expecting to see some baby Nadders appear. Then they realised that Nadder eggs were the kind that exploded when hatching, and just in the nick of time dived behind the nearest shelter.

* * *

><p>Several Hours Previously

Now, whilst the residents of Berk were sitting around, or in Astrid's case casually masturbating, waiting for devastating winter to set in, Hiccup, Fishlegs, Ruffnut and the Artemis' crew had been fighting for their lives against an enemy that only one of them had ever faced down. And that was only once, in the process of which Hiccup had lost his lower left leg, and hadn't been fighting one that had its own rider.

When Hiccup saw the Red Death, he almost fainted right there and then. Especially when he saw Dagur on its back. The last dragon that the deranged Berserker leader had tried to tame was the Skrill, and that had been bad enough. Now he had seemingly tamed a dragon that could turn all their dragons against them. There was nothing for it, however. They would have to fight Dagur.

"Ok, any suggestions?" Hiccup called out. "I'm throwing this wide open."

"If I might suggest something?" Fishlegs whimpered. "RUN!"

"No, Fishlegs!" Hiccup yelled at him. "That's Dagur up there, for Thor's sake! We can't just let him run around with a Red Death! We've got to do something!"

"Uh, Hiccup" Ruffnut started.

"Well what do you suggest, chief? We just charge right in and hope a few of us don't get killed?!"

"Guys?!" She said with increase urgency.

"No, Fishlegs, dammit! We need a strategy" "

"HICCUP!" Ruffnut screamed.

"What?!" He shouted back. Then he noticed her arm pointing to something coming from the direction of the sun. He squinted to get a look at it, and for a moment could not believe what he was seeing.

Heading towards them, at phenomenal speed, was a Night Fury. At least, he thought it was. It definitely had the same general shape and body plan, but the similarity ended there. Where your typical Night Fury was jet black from nose to tail, this one had a hide that was closer to violet. The scales of this dragon seemed to shine with their own inner light, as though it generated its own luminescence. It was also about twice as big as the average Fury. But that wasn't the best part. No, the best part was the company that came with it.

"Are those?" Fishlegs didn't dare finish the question, for fear that he was actually dreaming.

"You're not dreaming, Fishlegs!" Hiccup laughed. "Those are Night Furies!" And so they were. And not just two or three or four, but dozens of them, all flying in perfect attack formation, the violet Fury at the head of the pack. The purple dragon hovered before the assembled riders, before looking at the Red Death, its rider equally shocked. Then, it flew up to right before Hiccup and Toothless, before looking straight into the eyes of the awestruck rider.

Suddenly, Hiccup was overwhelmed by some force he had never experienced before " his body became disconnected from his mind, and whilst his limbs still functioned in as much as he managed to stay on Toothless' back, he had no control over them otherwise. His mind itself was directly assailed by a foreign entity, and Hiccup realised that something " or someone " had taken over his mind. Suddenly, the consciousness started to sift through his memories, very specifically. It was like seeing his life being played before him in sequence, except that all the memories related to one thing " his knowledge of the dragons, and especially his relationship with Toothless. The consciousness stopped, lingering on the memory of his first friendly encounter with Toothless, on that fateful day in the cove, when he had finally bonded with him, quite literally

placing his blind trust in the dragon.

As quickly as it had started, the miasma in his mind ceased, and he regained control over his body. The concerned look he got from Ruffnut showed the episode had not gone unnoticed.

"Hey, are you alright?"

"I'm fine, Ruff. Something strange happened, like something was, reading my mind orâ€|" Then it clicked, and he slowly looked up at the shining dragon before him. It looked back, radiating intelligence, and extended its mind again. This time, though, it was more tentative, as though it was asking permission, rather than forcing itself into his mind, and then Hiccup felt it speak.

You are the one known as Hiccup? It asked. Hiccup was psyched out now. The dragon in front of him was capable of using its mind in a way unseen by anything before now. And it was talking to him. Its voice, if he could call it that, was distinctly female, and while it wasn't a particularly old voice, as it were, it belied an old, vast intelligence, one born of centuries of life.

"Uh, yes, I am." He said, unsure of how to respond.

You may call me Dsatari.

"Ds-Dsatari?" He stumbled over the strange name.

_Yes. The dragon you ride, the one you call Toothless, part of the breed you call Night Furies, is the reason I am here. _She began to project thoughts and images into his mind, like a series of pictures, but not just visually. With each thought, Hiccup could interpret the sensations of the memory, the smells, the sounds, the glare of the sunlight in his eyes. _The Night Furies, or the Nyx Drycari as they should be called, are all the progeny of my race. They share with us our intelligence, but lack our, unique, way of communicating it. They are meant to be challenges of a very different kind. Challenges for your race._

"Challenges? What do you mean, challenges?"

All dragons have an instinctive need to bond with people, when the false alphas are not trying to control them, but Night Furies are selective with who they choose. They do not just bond with anyone. Only the greatest exemplars of your race are considered worthy, each one an avatar of your finest traits.

"Avatar?" Hiccup realised what she was getting at. "Then, am I that avatar?"

Yes. You are the avatar of the god that the people nearby call Jupiter. The leader of their gods is not just a valiant warrior, or a skilled leader, but also a peacemaker, a diplomat who is most effective in times of great crisis. You are his avatar, the exemplar of peace. And as such, you are our only hope.

"Only hope of what?"

_Our salvation. _The images ceased, replaced with an impression that told Hiccup that what she was about to say was of the utmost

importance. Members of your race from the future have spoken to me. They told me of things that I dare not imagine, crimes and horrors that are beyond my comprehension. In their future, we dragons do not exist. But that future does not have to happen.

"What do you mean, it doesn't have to happen?" Hiccup asked, completely overwhelmed by all of this.

You must find that out for yourself. Your actions will help dictate our future. If you are not careful, it will be the same as theirs. I have given you the knowledge you need to save us. You must now be bold enough to use it. Dsatari turned to her flock, and gestured towards Dagur and the Red Death. Immediately, they swarmed the Berserker group, and drove off the Red Death within seconds.

As the Berserkers scattered, two of the Furies returned, carrying Dagur between them in their paws, before dropping him into the net that two of the Artemis' crew were carrying.

I have saved your life today, in the hope that I can expect you to return the favour. As for the heathen rider, he is yours to do with as you will. The alphas serve a purpose, and that is to ensure that the humans do not turn us into pets or pack animals. Dragons are still wild creatures, and the only way they can remain so is through the alphas. No human can conquer an alpha; it is a perversion that nature cannot allow.

"I understand." Hiccup said, looking at Dagur, who seemed utterly dazed by the turn of events. "What should I do now?"

You must find us, o Dragon Master. Find us in our natural home, and then you will know what it truly means to be a dragon rider.

"But, you're here now. Why can't you just show me?"

That is not the point.

"Then what is?!"

You must determine that for yourself. However, I can help you one last time. She leaned her snout to touch Toothless' forehead, and he closed his eyes, entering an almost trance-like state. Toothless is your dragon, but he is, first and foremost, your best friend. You have tried to master the dragon language, only so you would be able to talk to him. Now, I will grant you the ability to do so without the need to speak our tongue. I have opened his mind, so that he might hear the thoughts of another. I must also do the same to you. Hiccup caught on to the implied request.

"I understand. By all means, please." He gave his permission to Dsatari. Suddenly, the presence returned to his mind, but this time, his mind was filled with light for a brief moment. When the light faded, he felt, different. It was as though his mind had been behind an invisible barrier, and now a small opening had appeared. Through it, he could sense a stream of thoughts, somewhat alien to his own, and he realised that he could, for the first time, speak to Toothless.

Toothless? He thought, gently.

_Hiccup! _He felt the reply, and suddenly, every doubt, every fear, every niggling problem in his mind suddenly fell away. He had known Toothless for five years, had built up a friendship that transcended everything, even his marriage to Astrid, but now, for the first time, they could truly understand each other. Now, they were beyond friendship. Beyond everything. Hiccup was lost for words, but for Toothless he didn't need them. The sable dragon sensed his overwhelming joy, and joined in it, letting his sheer ecstasy fill Hiccup's mind.

This gift will last you for as long as you live. It will never fade, and only when one of you dies will the bond be broken. Dsatari sensed their joy, and felt it herself. She projected a tendril of thought to attract their full attention._ Hiccup, Toothless, I give to you the task of saving this world. The memories I shared with you are crucial. They will be your guide. But remember this; you must not seek out the goal. Only through living can you achieve this mightiest of undertakings. You will know when you must act, when the time is right. If you try to act before, or after, you will fail. _She sent a wave of thought, an instruction, to the flock of Furies, and they all turned to fly, off into the horizon. _We must leave for our eyries, but know that we will always fly to your aid._

_But, how can you know when we need it? _Toothless asked. Dsatari laughed quietly in response.

My young dragon, anyone can know, if only they can learn to read the signs in the natural realm. The bond between you is one that does not go unnoticed by the world around you. Trust me, I will know. As she turned to leave, Hiccup stopped her with a thought.

_Hang on a minute. _She turned to look at him. _Wha- why us? Why have you chosen us to do this?_

She looked long and hard at him, her golden eyes betraying an emotion that neither could quite understand.

Because, it must always be you.

And with the final cryptic message, she turned towards horizon, and flew off into the sky, leaving a group of highly confused dragon riders, an even more confused prisoner of war, and two best friends with a lot to think about.

Do you think we'll see her again, bud? Hiccup thought.

_Yes. _Toothless answered, with a certainty that surprised even himself. _But not for a long time yet._

* * *

><p>A knock on his cabin door abruptly woke Hiccup. He blearily opened his eyes, and realised that his encounter with the purple Night Fury had, in fact, been a dream. He swung his legs out of the bunk, and opened the door to reveal one of the Artemis' crew members, a tall, lanky ginger lad, with a smattering of freckles just below his green eyes.</p>

"The captain wanted me to inform you that we'll be landing in Roma Nova in half an hour." The young officer said in an accent that

Hiccup had recently identified as Irish.

"Thank you. I'll be there in fifteen minutes." The officer saluted, and headed off down the corridor. As Hiccup closed the door, he sighed, closing his eyes to shed the single tear of despondency that had carved a path down his cheek; it could have been a tear of acid. He sat down on the bunk, his head in his hands, feeling his dreams and hopes be dashed again.

Wishful thinking. He thought. _Why can't something for once just go right in my life?_

_Hey! _Hiccup sat up in surprise, Toothless' voice rebounding in the inside of his skull, the ghost of a smile tugging at his lips. _What about me? !_

12. Senatus Populusque Roma Nova

****I am so sorry it has taken me this long to post my next chapter. Life decided to intervene and prevent me from doing so. But at long last, I have prevailed! Here is chapter 12, where we finally arrive in Roma Nova, meet some old friends of Traask, learn a little about Roman history and revisit an old mystery. Enjoy!****

****DISCLAIMER: Most of this content is owned by Dreamworks Animations and Cressida Cowell, with a little bit of my own inventions. Just a little bit.****

* * *

><p>Senatus Populusque Roma Nova<p>

Traask was watching from the bridge as their destination, Roma Nova, came into view. He had first come here several years ago, being pursued by a flotilla of smaller airships. Whilst they were, pound for pound, no match for the Artemis' superior strength and firepower, they were faster and more manoeuvrable, and their constant harassment tactics had taken their toll on the old girl. It was as they were passing this stretch of coast that Traask had seriously considered ordering the crew to abandon ship, when all of a sudden, the lead enemy vessel exploded, then the next, and then the remaining three. Utterly perplexed, Traask ordered the Artemis down to land, in order to effect repairs.

The next morning, a messenger arrived from the nearby town, with an invitation for Traask to join the Proconsul, the town's leader, in a 'civilised and amiable discussion'. Traask doubted that the young boy knew what either of those words meant, but you didn't turn down a polite invitation like that.

As it turned out, the townspeople had shot down the pursuing airships the night before, with assistance from their own dragon riders; as the conn piloted her into the aerodock now, Traask saw the formidable guns still standing sentry, five years later, and wondered how on earth they had come up with those. Gratefully wondered, for the Proconsul had been kind enough to insist that the Artemis be outfitted with a full set of them herself.

Traask's thoughts were interrupted when Hiccup walked onto the

bridge. Traask immediately noticed something was up; the young Viking chief was walking with a new spring in his step, as though he'd seen or heard something that had really made his day. Hiccup smiled at his uncle as he stood next to him, the young thin Viking a sharp contrast next to the older, well-built captain.

"You ok?" Traask said.

"Me? Great! Just, great. Why do you ask?"

"Nothing, really. It's just that you seem to be in a finer mood than usual, that's all."

"That's because I am." Hiccup said cheerfully.

"Oh. Any particular reason?"

"I'll explain later. You'd probably think I'd gone mad if I just told you straight." Despite Hiccup's desire for patience, Traask could tell that he was bursting to tell him something.

"Well, ok then." Traask turned to look out of the viewport again. "This town, Nova Roma they call it, has a very rich history. The townspeople are all descendants of the citizens of the old Roman Empire. After it collapsed, roughly a thousand years ago, the Empire was torn apart and any real memory of it was scattered to the four winds. But not here – these people remember. Their families were very old – older even than the Empire itself."

"They were around before the Romans?"

"No. Before the Empire, Rome was a democracy, ruled by the Roman Senate. It was arguably a better time. The Republic was governed by the senators in Rome itself and the three ruling families further afield; the Brutii, Scipii and Julii. The people of Roma Nova have adopted the old ways. They are ruled by their Senate, a house of fifty individuals, half elected from the townsfolk, half from the outlying farms, homesteads and other holdings who are part of the town's environs.

"From the elected senate, there are three leadership roles that are decided amongst the senators. The Praetor is the elected general of the town's defence forces, a highly trained militia which claims its ancestry from the Twelfth Legion Fulminata."

"Twelfth Legion what?" Hiccup asked.

"Fulminata. It translates as 'armed with lightning'; the legion's emblem is a thunderbolt. This particular legion was said to have been raised by Gaius Julius Caesar himself, the man who founded the Roman Empire. The Legion is split into five cohorts, each captained by a centurion. There are two praetors who lead the Legion, the Praetor elected by the Senate, and another who holds the role for life. The life Praetor is their people's greatest expert in the art of war, who traditionally spends their whole life devoted to studying tactics and strategy. The safety of their entire people is placed in their hands, after all."

"Why have an elected Praetor?" Hiccup asked. "Why not just have two who stay at it for life?"

"An apt question, and the kind I would encourage." Traask nodded his approval at his nephew. "That is exactly the kind of thinking you should show among these people. They are a very enlightened people, who appreciate a sharp and philosophical mind.

"As for the answer to your question, the reason for the elected official is simple: it keeps power within the elected government. Officially, the senatorial praetor is the superior officer, although they often defer to the judgement of the life praetor. This changes during times of war, when the life praetor assumes direct command of the legion. This ensures that, whilst no one can abuse their power as praetor, the legion is most effectively led during actual combat.

"The second official is the Pontifex Maximus, the religious leader of the town. These people are deeply spiritual, and find great comfort in the proper worship of their gods. The Pontifex Maximus is charged with properly honouring the gods, as well as acting as their voice among the people.

"The final official is the Proconsul, who is the elected leader of the senate. The Proconsul's word is the last in the senate, and ultimately it is the Proconsul who decides what laws are effected by the senate."

"Surely that defeats the object? Why have a senate at all if all the decisions are made by one man?"

"The senate represents the hearts and minds of all the townspeople. They are invariably charged with bringing the most relevant issues to the senate for discussion, and whilst the Proconsul approves which decisions become law, it is the senate who make such choices in the first place. Without the senate, the Proconsul would rule blindly, disconnected from the needs of the populace. Without the Proconsul, the senate might spend weeks in deadlock over the simplest of issues. They need each other, and largely respect the choices the other makes."

"Largely?" Traask raised an eyebrow at the question.

"You're telling me that you've never had to mediate any disputes between your people?" Hiccup conceded his point, watching with curiosity as they came closer to the town. It was very different from what he was used to. The entire town was surrounded by a large, strong wall, with gates at each of the cardinal directions, and square towers placed every so often around the wall. From the tops of each of the towers extended a long, large metal tube, and although Hiccup had never seen anything like it, he felt a deep sense of foreboding.

"Don't worry about them." Traask reassured him, as though able to read his mind. "Those are the air defence weapons that we have aboard the ship. They're very effective. Capable of bringing down all but the most heavily armoured airships."

"Or dragons." Hiccup almost whispered. Traask processed that thought, and became acutely aware of his nephew's apprehension.

"I don't think I've ever thought of it quite like that." He muttered

to himself. "We'll be landing in a few minutes. If you want to fly in on Toothless, the locals always appreciate a show." Hiccup smiled at the suggestion; riding out with Toothless was always at the top of his 'best ideas' list. But Traask thought that there was a little more to it than that.

_That boy is acting strange today. _He mentally corrected himself. _Stranger. I must find out what's up with him. _As Hiccup left the bridge, Traask turned to direct the landing procedure, thankfully aided by the towns dedicated aerodock. He thought on all the things he needed to get done here, and then something else occurred to him. An old acquaintance, perhaps something a little more than that, should still be here. He'd have to ask Hiccup to oversee the trades they intended to make, for while they were important, there was an old promise he needed to make good on.

* * *

><p>Lucius Herennius looked out from the balcony that encircled the upper floor of his villa, watching the commotion in the streets. They rarely had foreign visitors here, and the arrival of the Artemis and Captain Faetherson, who he liked to consider a friend was always a welcome sight. Of course, the last time Traask had docked here, he was just a senator. At least they'd have something to talk about, then.</p>

As he watched the airship slowly manoeuvre its way to the landing pad, his wife, Fabia, came out onto the balcony, wrapping her arms around her husband's broad chest.

"How many years has it been since you last met?" She asked him in flawless Latin, their local tongue.

"Far too many, my darling. It will be good to see him again."

"Indeed. I imagine your promotion will come as quite a surprise."

"Just what I was thinking." Lucius squeezed his wife's hand affectionately, before turning to walk back inside. "I had better prepare to meet him at the aerodock. Will you join us?"

"Of course!" She smiled, following him down the stairs to the open, mosaic tiled court that was the centre of their home. "He's my friend too, you know. And perhapsâ€¦" She noticed in her peripheral vision that their daughter, Chiara, casually leaning on the railing of the upper floor, was trying too hard to not take an interest in their conversation. She gave her husband a meaningful look.

"Perhaps we should." He nodded shrewdly, their long years together happily married creating an almost instinctual level of understanding between them, before turning back for a moment.

"Chiara, my dearâ€¦"

* * *

><p>Half an hour later, the Artemis had touched down, the aerodock workers had secured her in place, and Traask was walking down the

cargo ramp, the last rays of the evening Italian sun kissing his face. Hiccup was there to meet him, still sat on Toothless' back, having taken his advice and flown down. A crowd had formed at the edge of the landing area, being held back by the legionnaires of the Third Cohort, who traditionally dedicated themselves to the defence of the town itself. Standing alongside Toothless, Traask saw the centurion of the Third, a young woman he had never met before. She was talking to a man dressed in full armour, who he recognised as the senatorial Praetor, by virtue of the purple sash he wore across his chestplate. Next to him was a woman he recognised as Fabia Herennius, the wife of his friend-<p>

Traask did a double-take, and realised that the Praetor was, in fact, Lucius Herennius, his old friend of many years, who he had kept in good contact with over the years.

Lucius noticed Traask walking down the ramp, and heartily laughed, his arms thrown wide in a welcoming gesture.

"Traask Faetherson! It's been far too long since last you graced our presence."

"Far too long indeed, my old friend." Traask smiled, embracing the older man. "Long enough, I see, for you to go and get yourself all important!"

"I see you've noticed." Lucius laughed. "I was asked to stand for Praetor not long after you left the last time, what was it now, three years ago?"

"I see. What happened to Praetor Septimus?"

"Nero? An unfortunate accident, I'm afraid. He and the Second Cohort were ambushed out near the southern vineyards by a band of marauders. He quite literally took an arrow to the knee, and sustained a permanent injury. Retired not long afterwards, and I stood in the coming election. With no competition, I joined the Legion a week later." Traask gave him a suspicious look.

"Lucius, I know you better than that. There's far more to it than you're letting on."

"Well of course there is, but I thought that you might appreciate the rest over a good meal and a glass of fine wine." Both men laughed heartily at that, then Fabia came over to greet Traask.

"Of course, we would be most delighted to have you stay with us for the duration of your visit." Fabia placed her hands on her husband's shoulder. "It'll be just like the old days, when you were running your trade route around the Mediterranean."

"I would be honoured and delighted, Fabia, as always. But I must make an insistence on you first."

"Oh?" Fabia replied. Traask turned and beckoned Hiccup, who dismounted and walked over to the group, Toothless following at his side. Traask placed an arm around his thin shoulders before he said, "If you wish to have me as your guest of honour, I must also insist that you extend your hospitality to my nephew, Hiccup, and his good friends who have travelled with us."

"Of course, my friend. We would be delighted." He proffered a hand to Hiccup, who shook it amiably. "It'll be good to have the villa feel like it's used again."

"I'm honoured by your hospitality, Praetor." Hiccup said sincerely.

"Please, Lucius. Any family of Traask here is always welcome in our home." Lucius noticed the sable dragon next to him, recognising him as Hiccup's own. "And who is your friend here?" He gestured to Toothless, scratching his snout affectionately.

"This is Toothless." Hiccup said proudly.

"Toothless?" Fabia said. "That's rather an odd name, at least for your dragon."

"It's a long story." Hiccup told her. "And he's a lot more than just my dragon." He rubbed the back of Toothless' neck, smiling as if to a joke only he was hearing.

"But of course." Fabia smiled, noticing the obvious bond between the two of them. "Our people are accustomed to dragon riders. Although not everyone around here has one, anyone who's anyone has their homes built to accommodate both humans and dragons alike. He'll be most welcome here."

"Thank you." Hiccup smiled back. "It's most appreciated."

"Perhaps you'd take Hiccup back to the villa." Traask suggested. "I have to organise everything here anyway. Shall I join you for dinner later?"

"Of course, Traask." Lucius grasped his forearm, a gesture Traask returned, before turning to Hiccup. "I'm sure you'll enjoy your stay here." He gestured for Hiccup to follow him, before engaging him in a conversation about the local dragon species. As Traask turned to go, Fabia gently caught his arm.

"Traask." She said.

"Yes, Fabia?" He asked.

"When you have a moment, there is a matter I'd like to discuss with you. In private."

"Of course." Traask smiled his understanding. "May I ask what about?"

"It concerns Chiara." Traask looked at her suddenly, surprise etched on his face. Fabia simply smiled and squeezed his arm, before heading after her husband. Traask looked around, and saw Chiara herself. She shyly waved at him, before melting back into the crowd.

He looked on at the point where she was standing, and wondered. Perhaps things would turn out well after all.

* * *

><p>The Forum was packed with people, as usual; everywhere you looked, merchants were flogging their wares, shouting across the plaza to attract more customers, friends were stopping to talk on every corner, news and gossip spreading like wildfire, and in the middle of it all, the assassin was making his way towards the new arrivals â€“ in particular, the gangly young man with the sleek, black Night Fury. He smiled, feeling the rush of adrenaline and anticipation he felt before every kill. He would have to do it at range; there was no way he could get close enough to stab him, not while he was amiably talking with Praetor Herennius. He reached inside his jacket and closed his hands around the blowpipe that nestled there. The darts were coated in a poisonous substance derived from the venom of the African desert scorpions and the poisonous frogs found in the New World. Although it would be obvious that he had been assassinated, his employer had assured him that it wouldn't matter. So long as they both died, the dragon especially, his employer had promised him payment enough for him to live in luxury for the rest of his life.<p>

He was about to make his move, when the sixth sense that he had developed during a lifetime of this work told him that something was amiss, and that something was probably the young woman standing in the crowd behind him, a long brown travelling cloak disguising her golden eyes and silver bow, staring directly at him. He looked around, and straight at her. As their eyes met, he knew he had been discovered. She looked at him, and smiled, slightly raising one eyebrow â€“ her calling card, telling her victims that they were about to die.

The assassin ran. There was nothing else for it. Now he had been marked, there was nowhere safe on earth. These people were everywhere, and seemingly had the ability to do whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted and to whoever they wanted. They appeared, found their target, and then the target died. Or vanished. Or was found dismembered or half-eaten by wolves. They had many ways to kill a man.

The assassin ran down an alleyway, and nearly fell when a sharp whistling sound flew straight past his left ear, and a silver arrow embedded itself in the opposite wall. He burst through the door and ran up the stairs, following his pre-established escape route. He ran into the door that would lead onto the rooftops, and his way out of the city, and found it locked. He wrestled with the lock in a blind panic, and then realised that he had been well and truly caught out. He turned around quickly as he heard footsteps coming up the stairs, drawing his dagger as he did so, but it was swiftly knocked out of his hands by another silver arrow, fired by the young woman who had pursued him. She nocked another arrow, and drew her bow back as a man in a long, black coat and wearing round, tinted glasses climbed the stairs, his gait making him appear to glide, like a spectre in the mist.

"Well now, this is a wonderful opportunity, Mr. Sorlon." He spoke softly, his voice sending shivers down Sorlon's spine.

"Who are you?!" Sorlon shouted, scared out of his wits. "How do you know my name?"

"We, Mr. Sorlon, are concerned citizens." The man said. "We found out your false identity, as well as all your other identities, from your

contact. We are here, Mr. Sorlon, because we are very interested in identities. Especially the identity of your employerâ€|"

13. Names and Faces

Greetings, dear readers!

Sooooo... I promised a Christmas chapter... And now it's March... So, yeah. Sorry about that (ehe).

**BUT, I have made up for it by inadvertently fitting a lot of awesome things into this chapter, including: the Academy recruits do Snoggletog, fatherly advice from one species to another, NAMING THE FURY HATCHLINGS, Haddock baby being adorable despite not being born yet, and... spoilers! You'll have to actually read the damned thing to find out the last surprise! Mwahahahaha! **

**Anyways, my uttermost thanks to AleryaLeveilli, Remedy's Melody 109, Zubat 98 and JubJub 0250 for suggesting names. You have all had suggestions actually used in story, hopefully you'll know them when you see them. And also thanks to whoever suggested Vortex as a name, because I can't find out who did suggest it and I'm sure as hell I didn't come up with it myself. Thank you all eternally from the bottom of my soul for staying with this story for so long, I cannot apologise enough for the delay (delay is putting it waaay too kindly, but I can't think of another word for my inexcusable lack of writing.) and I hope you really enjoy this chapter. Also, if you have any ideas you would like to see effected in the story, don't be too shy to drop me a line (or fifty) with Ideas. **

* * *

><p>Names and Faces

It had been almost two months since Hiccup had visited Roma Nova. The trade negotiations had been a resounding success: in return for essential food supplies, advanced tools and weapons and a regular assortment of luxury items, Hiccup had agreed to help the town properly develop its dragon riding facilities. Fishlegs had volunteered to oversee the initial work, and as such was not able to celebrate Berk's traditional winter festival with them. Traask was also away, as the Artemis was forced to ground on a small island and wait out a particularly nasty storm. It was going to be unusual to have Snoggletog without them, more so Fishlegs than Traask, but both would be missed, nonetheless.

Even though the sun had barely started to rise, Hiccup was already awake, poring over a problem that had niggled at his mind ever since he had returned to Berk. On the desk he had in the forge was a pile of reports gathered by the authorities in Roma Nova, a strange letter that had been sent to him from an 'ally of justice', and, the most curious of all, a pair of silver arrows. One had been found by Toothless the morning after he and Astragard had, well, and the other had been recovered by legionnaires of the Third Cohort, embedded in the body of a known assassin.

Hiccup picked up the reports again and pored over them, trying to find any details that had so far eluded him. They told him that the assassin, a man that the Twelfth Legion knew as Augustus Sorlon, had

been found in a storeroom off the Grand Forum, shot through the heart with a silver arrow. The investigation found no trace of the murderer, and Sorlon's rather shady reputation hadn't encouraged the Legion to pursue it very far â€“ they had lost more than a few men to the man's shadier activities.

The report in itself meant nothing to Hiccup, but the fact the arrow that killed him was identical to the one that Toothless had found was intriguing to say the least. The mysterious note that he had received was even more so; it had said simply, "You were Sorlon's target, Dragon Master. Take care of the company you keep. He worked for far darker forces. You are indebted to us for stopping him â€“ we did save your life, after all."

Hiccup put the report back, and rubbed his forehead with his palms. This was a riddle wrapped in a mystery, and he didn't really care about solving it any time soon. His mental reverie was interrupted when Gobber knocked on the door.

"Yer up early, son." He remarked. "That still botherin' yer?"

"You have no idea." Hiccup sighed. "It's a mystery that I'll have to solve sooner or later, because if I don't, it'll probably solve itself, and quite dangerously."

"Aye, you've got a point there, Hiccup. But not today. Today we celebrate Snoggletog, especially as we've got a few firsts this year." Gobber chuckled. "Yer first Snoggletog as a married man, the first with the new Furies, the first with yer mother!" He pointed out.

"The first without dad." Hiccup almost whispered, staring blankly at the wall in front of him. Gobber's smile faded, as the realisation he had been ignoring for the last three weeks finally hit home.

"Aye, Hiccup. That too." They shared a knowing glance, and both realised that neither of them had truly got over his death. "We'll be alright."

"I know." Hiccup smiled softly up at him.

"Now come on," Gobber gestured for Hiccup to follow him. "We have work ter do."

* * *

><p>Astrid was coordinating the newest academy recruits in the construction of the main Snoggletog decoration, the big wooden statue that closely resembled the local pine trees. After two months of solid training, under herself, Hiccup, Fishlegs, Gobber and Valka, they had become good at working together on dragonback. Hilda, Harald and Greta were on the ground, using Varmthjerte, Donner and Blitzen to secure the decorations in place. Heimdall was holding a pallet of wooden planks aloft, whilst Magnus directed Frigga and ThunderClaw to place them correctly. Astrid had found that they didn't need much coordination; they worked well together, and when any disputes broke out, which was rare indeed, Magnus usually stepped in and took control before Astrid had the chance. She was very proud of her little brother.<p>

She smiled up at him from the ground, and he smiled briefly back at her, before continuing his directions to the group. A twinge of pain in her lower back caused Astrid to gasp quietly, rubbing the painful area with one hand. Her pregnancy had been a little further along than they had expected, and her stomach was already swollen enough to start causing her general discomfort. As things stood, they were expecting the little one to arrive in about three months, and, truth be told, she was getting rather nervous about it; excitedly nervous, but nervous none the less.

Valka had reassured her that everything would be fine, and that if she wasn't nervous something would have, in fact, been wrong. But, despite the many reassurances from all the women in the village, Astrid was still a little anxious. For the first time since her passing, Astrid wished her mother were still here.

She was distracted from her thoughts when she saw Hiccup amble over with Toothless, who was currently fulfilling his own parenting role by the virtue of having all six of the hatchlings lazing across his shoulders and lower back. She smiled when she saw Toothless; ever since Astragard had come into his life, he had been so much happier with himself.

Those hatchlings were the best thing to happen to himÂ, she thought. Even more so than Hiccup.

* * *

><p>Three Months Later

Hiccup and Toothless hung lazily in the thermals that rose up around Berk this time of year, alone with their thoughts. Well, alone if you didn't count the hatchlings gently snoozing on Toothless' back, and with their thoughts in so much as together with their thoughts.

Do you remember that time on Eel Island? Hiccup asked.

Not by choice I don't. Toothless cringed. That had been a bad day. A very bad day.

Point taken. Hiccup looked out on the horizon. Can I ask you a question, Tooth?

Sure.

Were you ready to be a father?

Ah, I thought this might come up.

What the Hel's that supposed to mean? He looked accusingly at his scaly friend.

Well, what with the baby due any time now, I thought it might, you know.

Know what?

Ach, I don't know how to say this. Toothless thought for a moment. Well, you're not exactly comfortable in a situation beyond your control.

Your point being?

Well, parenting is a situation more beyond your control than most.

_Yeah, good point. _Hiccup sighed. _Ok, I'll admit the whole thing has me a little nervous._

A little?

Ok, a lot nervous. But you seem to have taken things in your stride.

_Trust me, I haven't. _Toothless insisted. _Astra was pretty cool with it all when it happened. Still is, thank the ancient ones. But me? I was freaking the fuck out on the inside. Just, don't tell her I said that. She'll never let me hear the end of it._

Hiccup chuckled. _I promise I won't tell her anything. _He absent-mindedly stroked one of the hatchlings, trying to remember which one it was, when he was suddenly struck by a moment of incredulity. _Toothless, do the hatchlings actually have names?_

No, He answered. _We recognise identity by a myriad number of different things; scent, mannerism, unique markings and so on. We use those to describe individuals, so we've never really needed names.

—

Well, should we give them some? I mean, you may not need names, but we humans don't have the luxury of acute senses, soâ€!

_Point taken. _Toothless stared at the waves below him. _Would you do it?_

Wait-wait, what?

Dragons are pretty useless at names, probably why we don't use them, so I won't be able to think of good ones. And, wellâ€!

Wellâ€!?

_I can't think of anyone I'd entrust this to more than you. _Toothless looked back at his best friend. _You're my best friend, Hiccup. You've been there in the best of times, and pulled me through the worst, and I know you'll always be there for us. For all of us. _Hiccup had never failed to let Toothless know how much he meant to him, but he had never expected to hear the same words reflected right back at him.

_Thanks, bud. _He rested his hand on the back of Toothless' head, smiling gratefully at him. Toothless smiled back, something he had become much better at over the years. Hiccup then sat back and thought about names.

Alright, let's start with the males. He picked up one of the hatchlings, determined it was a boy, and thought about what made a good name. The hatchling opened its eyes and looked at Hiccup,

bemused as to why the lanky human was examining him so intently. Hiccup noticed his eyes were a particularly dark shade of indigo. They reminded him of an eclipse he had seen onceâ€!

Hey, that's a good name.

What is?

Eclipse.

Really?

Sure it is.

_Well, I'll take your word for it. I'm gonna go over there. _He shifted his wings and flew about ten metres to the right and three up.

What's so special about here?

The thermals are better. More of a crimson colour.

Wait, whatâ€! crimson?!

_It's a dragon thing. Don't worry about it. _Utterly perplexed, Hiccup chose to focus on the task at hand. Next, he picked up the largest male, easily identified by the strange birthmark on his neck.

_Hm. _Hiccup wondered. _His birthmark kind of reminds me of Mjolnir.

_

_Wha? _Toothless looked at him as though he had grown an extra eye.

Mjolnir, the hammer that Thor wields. You see, the mark has got this kind of straight bit, then a large patch, like a hammer head, and then these lines splaying out, like lightning bolts.

What have lightning bolts gotta do with hammers?

Thor's hammer reputedly casts lightning on command.

_Ohh. _

Yeah. Maybe he should be calledâ€! Dark Thunder.

You must be joking.

_Yeah, that is kind of terrible. Ok, um, what about Nightbolt, or Black Lightning, or maybeâ€! how about Shadowstorm? _Toothless tried it out in his head.

_Shadowstorm. SHADOWstorm. ShadowSTORMâ€! _

I can hear you, Toothless.

_What? Oh, sorry. Yeah, that sounds pretty good. _The next hatchling Hiccup picked up was not particularly appreciative of the fact that he had just been picked up, and made his feelings known by flaring

his wings and growling menacingly at him. Hiccup yelped, and almost dropped him. Toothless noticed the commotion, and growled a warning at the hatchling, who immediately fell silent. Hiccup gingerly put him down, but it was clear from the dark looks sent his way that the hatchling was still angry at being disturbed.

Be careful with that one. He's something of a scrapper.

You don't say.

He wouldn't actually hurt you, but you've still got to watch him like a hawk.

_Or a dragon. _Hiccup retorted.

True, that. He'll make a fine wraith one day.

Wraith?

Yeah. Wraiths are Night Furies that become particularly dangerous fighters. Well respected in the community and all, but best treated with caution all the same.

_Right. _Just then, the light bulbs in Hiccup's brain flashed on. _And that's what we'll call him. Wraith._

You do know that if we call him that it'll go straight to his head and he'll get even worse?

So? It's a good name. Appropriate, too. And I thought you said wraiths were well respected.

Well, if you insist.

_Hey, he's your son. If you don't like it, just say. _Toothless was silent for a moment.

No, Wraith is good. It'll give him a good start in life too.

It will?

_Trust me. _Toothless turned to look at him. _Wraiths are _very _well respected._

_Alright then. _Hiccup looked around for the final male. _Hey, where's the last male?_

_Right above you, probably. _Hiccup looked up, and flinched slightly when he noticed the hatchling was virtually on top of him.

I didn't know they could fly this early.

Not normally. He's an early developer, that one.

Is there some special name for early flyers, Tooth?

Yeah. They're called early flyers.

Oh, don't sass me, you smart-ass overgrown lizard!

_Hey, what's a good joke amongst friends? _Hiccup couldn't help but laugh at that, and Toothless quickly joined him.

_So, then. _Hiccup said when he had calmed down. _What do we call him?_

Any of your gods that fit the bill?

None I know of. Certainly none that could fly by ability.

Ok. How aboutâ€œ| hmmâ€œ| How about Vortex?

Vortex? And that has what to do with flyingâ€œ| ?

I don't know, it just sounded cool in my head.

_Ok then. Vortex it is. Now for the girls. _One of them happened to wake up at that moment, and when she saw Hiccup reaching for her decided to leap straight into his arms. Hiccup laughed at the excited hatchling, who smiled up at him.

Aww. Is she always this playful?

You bet. Her problem is that she's this playful with literally everything.

Everything?

Everything. Seems to have a particular liking for flowers, though.

Flowers?!

Yeah. The red, thorny ones, you know.

Roses?

_That's the one. Probably because of her eyes. _Hiccup looked into her eyes, and saw they were a rich scarlet colour.

You know that's not a bad name. Rose.

_Rose? It's good, but doesn't quite fit. _

What aboutâ€œ| Rosebud, then?

Yeah, that's better. Rosebud. Hiccup kissed the hatchling gently on her head, before putting her back with her brothers.

Then he reached for the final hatchling. As he lifted her up, she opened her eyes to look at him, before curling up and falling asleep in his arms. Hiccup cradled her in his arms, remembering the night they had first met.

You know, none of the others would do this.

_I know. She's very close to you. _

I'm very close to her. He gently stroked the sleepy hatchling, who purred gently, warming herself up with dragonfire in her belly. As

the last rays of dusk kissed his weathered face, the cool westerly wind ruffling his unkempt hair, he thought long and hard about the name of this little one.

_Stuck? _Toothless said, a little smugly.

Yeah, I guess so.

Thought you might be.

Oh, you did, did you?

_Well, she was the first Night Fury hatchling any of us has ever seen, and you were the first human she had ever seen, too. She's too special to rush this. I may be useless at names, but I know that much. _He sniffed at the winds blowing around his streamlined body. _I'll move over there, I think. Winds are more vestal.

-

Vestal?

_Yeah, it's a word I got from a Gronckle in Roma Nova. In their human language, it means fiery. _

Like Vesta.

_Yeah. _As Toothless flew down into the warmer winds, the hatchling suddenly looked up, and stared wondrously at the blazing sunset.

_Papaâ€| _she mewled.

It's ok, little one. Go back to sleep.

Butâ€| big fire, papa.

I know.

Toothless?

It's the little one. She's been able to talk a little since about a week after she hatched.

_I know. I heard. _Toothless looked around in surprise.

_Really? _

Yes. She called you papa.

That shouldn't be happening.

_Only as far as we know it shouldn't. _Hiccup pointed out. Toothless ceded his point with a shrug of his shoulders, and returned to concentrating on the thermals. The hatchling turned to look at Hiccup, and purred contentedly when he stroked her under her chin.

What did you call this wind again?

Vestal, after Vesta.

_That's what I thought. And I think Vesta is the perfect name for someone else, too. _Toothless looked around gently, and smiled. Vesta was the perfect name for the oldest of his children. He looked back, and saw the sun just begin to drop below the horizon.

We'd better turn back.

Agreed.

_Who knows, you might have another little one waiting for you to name. _Toothless chuckled.

_Yeah, yeah, laugh it up. _Hiccup gently batted the sable reptile's shoulders, as Toothless banked to their left and back to Berk. But secretly, he actually felt a little nervous about it. His own child was due any day now, and while he seriously doubted Astrid would have had the baby in the afternoon they were gone, he would certainly know upon their return, if not sooner, if it had begun the journey into life whilst he was gone. Especially knowing his luck.

* * *

><p>Astrid sat on the rocking chair that she had requisitioned for her own personal use whilst she was pregnant, waiting for Hiccup to return. She didn't mind him going off on his own. The baby was almost here, and she doubted he'd have time for being alone with Toothless very often, if at all, once it was here. Being the chief and raising a child was bound to take it out of him. She also imagined their sex life might take a bit of a dive, but then that wouldn't trouble them overly. Turns out that falling pregnant had, rather counter-intuitively, raised her sex drive to the maximum. The memories of times he had taken her over the table next to her, at her insistence that she was just too desperate to reach the bed, resurfaced, causing her to smile contentedly, and her crotch to drool tantalisingly. She quickly checked to ensure it was in fact the waters of sheer pleasure running down there, and not her waters actually breaking. Thankfully, it was the former.<p>

That being said, she had begun to start almost hoping it was. There had been several worst points in her pregnancy: first, morning sickness, that most dreaded of all things. Hiccup, being the sweet, kind, selfless darling he is, always knew how to acquire a bucket in those moments, thankfully. Then it was the swollen ankles. Then the really odd cravings, and finally the strain of baby's extra weight about two months ago. But none of it compared to the sheer torture of the endless, mind-numbingly boring _waitingâ€|. Still, could be worse. At least her sex drive was still through the roof.

She looked up at the sound of wings beating just outside the door, and stiffly got up to greet her husband. She opened the door to see Hiccup smoothly dismounting (_Damn, had his ass always been that hot?), before stroking Toothless gently behind the ears and walking towards her as Toothless flew off. Hiccup smiled broadly at Astrid, reaching his arms around her and kissing her deeply. She gently pulled him inside, using the kiss as an anchor, and closed the door behind them.

"Did you have a nice flight?" She said after finally breaking the kiss.

"It was good. Very good." Hiccup smiled. "But not as good as coming home to you." Astrid smiled, never failing to be utterly and shamelessly romanced by her husband. Then her smile turned to a look of odd surprise, as she felt something in her belly. She really shouldn't have put her hand to the spot quite so fast, forgetting that in her current state Hiccup would be scared half to death.

"Astrid, what is- AH! Oh gods, ohh gods, ok, um. What can I do? Should I get help, some water, a blanket, I- " Astrid silenced him with a finger on his lips.

"It's alright, Hiccup. Baby's not here yet. But she does want to say something to her over-anxious daddy."

"She?" Hiccup questioned her confidence in the sex of their soon to be little bundle of joy. Shaking her head, she took his right hand, feeling the calloused digits with her smooth fingers, and put it on her stomach, where a tiny hand was gently pushing on the inside. Astrid would never forget the look on his face when he felt that. It was like a rush of sheer joy, which she supposed is exactly what it was. He looked straight at her, his eyes shining with happiness.

"I love you, Astrid. Both of you."

And I love you too, Hiccup. All of you." They kissed again, but this time it was a little more passionate, just enough to warrant that gleam in her eyes that she knew he couldn't resist. He answered with the roguish half-smile he reserved for these, ahem, special occasions, before she slowly began to step backwards towards the opposite wall, beckoning seductively with one finger. Like a fish caught on a line, he followed her almost hypnotically. They needed no words â€“ just their love, and the occasional gasp of pleasure.

They ended up in the bedroom, Hiccup having carried her up the stairs. Astrid had lost her leggings by the fifth step, and her pants were hooked unceremoniously over the banister. She reached down between them, and undid the trousers of Hiccup's flight suit. As the stays came free, she felt the oh so familiar and always slightly overwhelming length of his manhood come free. She smiled seductively before grasping his forearms as he lay her gently on the pillows conveniently scattered on the floor. He placed three under her hips to raise her pelvis â€“ and her now dripping entrance â€“ away from her swollen belly. She closed her eyes, and waited for the ecstasy of their raw love. She didn't have to wait long before she felt him slide himself smoothly into her. A love-lusted sigh came from them both, and then Hiccup began to draw back, just as smoothly, and return with a little vigour. Then, just as she settled in for a smooth ride to nirvana, he changed tactics with a sharp grin, and immediately sped up to the fastest and hardest he could go. She gasped with surprise, her face-splitting grin betraying the divine pleasure he was wreaking on her as her first orgasm slowly pulsed across her body, her eyes jammed shut and her mouth laughing the night away. He changed his angle, and suddenly he was rubbing against the sensitive bundle of blood vessels that had been so good to her in her teens. Then the screaming began, and didn't stop for quite a while. An hour later, she felt him begin to tighten, and brought his fingers down on her clit so he could enjoy her going over the edge before he did. She barely registered him finishing through the misty

veil of pleasure, but she felt him lift her onto the bed, then saw him take off his flight suit in favour of an old shirt and soft cotton bed leggings, and lay down next to her, his arms pulling her protectively into his shoulder.

"Goodnight, Astrid." He whispered lovingly.

"Goodnight Hiccup." She kissed him back. Soon, exhaustion took them both, and they fell into a comfortable sleep, the ghosts of their never-ending smiles etched upon their sleepy faces.

* * *

><p>Hiccup just registered Astrid shaking him awake, his bleary eyes not registering her serious, forced confidence look.</p>

"Hiccup?" She said, her voice wavering slightly.

"What is it, babe?" He yawned.

"Could you do me a favour and fetch your mom, Ruffnut and Gothi?"

"Sure. You want me to go in the morning?"

"Actually, I need you to go now. Right now." Then he woke up, and wished to Thor he hadn't.

14. Tomorrow's Child

Greetings dear readers, of which there are an astonishingly increasing number, and welcome to chapter fourteen, where we see the conclusion of the most prickish cliffhanger in history (sorry!), the pseudo return of an old character, the actual return of a really old one, resolutions between friends, shamelessly ripping lines and concepts from Mad Max, and the arrival of a new OC! (Yes, it is what you think it is, I'm not actually that cruel.)

I am so sorry that it has taken me literally half a year to post a new chapter up here, but unfortunately Real Life decided to twist it's ugly fingers into my soul, and what with university, running a society and moving house, my hands have been ridiculously full.

**But never fear! I have finally made myself write a new chapter, and here it is! The conclusion you have all been waiting for! I hope I have delivered well, and that the wait was worth it.
Enjoy!**

DISCLAIMER: I own no characters (except the ones I do), no places (except maybe Roma Nova) and no dragons (that I am aware of) that appear in this work. All belong to Cressida Cowell and Dreamworks Animations. So there.

* * *

><p>Tomorrow's Child

Having your first child is always a daunting prospect, but for

Hiccup, it was exceptionally so. His mind, the treacherous bastard of a thing it is, always wandered off towards memories generally involving explosions, sharp edges, industrial accidents, dragon trainingâ€¦ in short, all the things that, with an infant in tow, would be bad. Very bad. Then his brain would remind him that these memories essentially made up his entire existence.

So when Astrid woke him up at two in the morning and told him to go and fetch Gothi and his mother with extreme urgency, the really good feeling of contentment that had been following him all day was suddenly and violently replaced with one of visceral panic. This was why he was in the Meade Hall, nursing a mug of, well, mead, with Eret â€“ who for some reason was always awake at this time of night â€“ trying to reassure him and Toothless being Toothless and sleeping happily, as if trying to poke fun at Hiccup's current emotional state.

"It'll be fine, lad." Eret said, taking a quaff from his own mug. "I'm sure that everything will go just fine." Hiccup could only nod, staring into the middle distance and taking a sip every so often, not realising his mug was in fact empty. Eret gave him a sympathetic look, and took the mug from his hand to go and refill it. Eret had seen people like this before, and knew that Hiccup was in for a long night.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile, a long way away from the happenings at Berk, a dragon rider and her mount were hunting their prey, across the icy wastes of Svalbard. The rider's face was completely concealed by a white scarf, a fur lined hood and a pair of large, tinted goggles, protecting her eyes from the glare of the ice. Her white furs kept her concealed against the landscape, but it would have taken a very keen eye to notice that the landscape she was hiding on was in fact her dragon, Jormungandr. Jormungandr was a lithe, serpentine reptile, with scales of pure white, so fine that they formed a smooth surface that was indistinguishable from the surrounding snow. The name that the local tribes gave his species was Moson Mogoi, or Ice Viper. Instead of fire, his breath was laden with ice so cold that it literally froze people on contact. It was said that the Ice Vipers' existence inspired the Norse myths of the Frost Giants.<p>

The pair had been hunting a gang of slavers, tracking them for over a hundred miles, waiting for the time to strike. They had been kidnapping teenage girls, none younger than fifteen, none older than twenty, all to be sold to the highest bidder, not as labourers, but as sex slaves. Slaver bands had been destroyed up and down the continent, eliciting a strong military response from the group ahead. They were about to find out what had destroyed the other slavers â€“ and that no amount of weaponry was going to stop her.

She pulled a hollow wooden tube and a crystal wrapped in cloth from inside her furs, before placing the crystal in a slot in the end of the tube and holding the makeshift telescope to her eyes. Through the looking glass, she saw the girls, all penned together in a rough wooden cage, none of them dressed properly for the cold climate. All were freezing, some had signs of hypothermia and frostbite, and it looked to her that some of them might have already succumbed to the cold. Then she shifted her focus, and saw the leader of the slavers. He was a thickset man, Mongolian in origin, with a thin, long black

moustache and a scar across his left eye. She smiled in recognition â€“ she had given him that scar ten years ago.

She put away her looking glass, and gently stroked the neck of her partner.

"Are you ready, Jormungandr?" She cooed. The Viper purred in response. She sat back in the saddle, before raising her hand high in the air. All around her, her fellow riders, overt two dozen in all, revealed themselves against the snow. Then, with a gleeful, wicked smile, she shouted a blood-chilling warcry into the air, a cry answered by her warriors, and charged.

* * *

><p>Hiccup had fallen asleep at the table, and was woken when the first rays of sunlight poked through the doors. He had heard no news yet, and Valka had told him it might be better to wait until someone came for him. After an hour of eating breakfast, doodling in his journal and pacing a hole into the floor, he decided to take an early morning flight with Toothless. He had been in the air only a moment before his nerves finally calmed down. Flying with Toothless had always had that effect on him. He wondered why he hadn't thought of doing this earlier.</p>

_You ok? _Toothless asked him.

_Yeah. Well, better than I was anyway. _He smiled at the dragon, and scratched his neck idly. _Things are going to be very different when we land._

That they are. But it'll be ok.

I sure hope so. I keep seeing images of a load of little versions of me building some giant mechanical monster and using it to make me do all their chores. Toothless giggled furiously.

That's _what you're afraid of? _He chuckled. _I can see now why you were so worried back there._

_Are you mocking me? _Hiccup demanded.

_No, no, no, noâ€| Yeah. _Toothless laughed.

_Oh, come on. _Hiccup complained. _Can you blame a man for being slightly nervous about the single biggest change in his life?_

_Well, I suppose not. _Toothless relented. _But being a man, well, for a given value of man, who has actually faced and lived down such a life-changing event, I think I have the right to crack a few jokes about it._

_I suppose you have got a point. _Hiccup answered. _Wait, are you still mocking me? _Toothless remained silent, giving Hiccup a very curious look, as if to say, I'll let you figure this one out on your own. As Hiccup looked to the horizon, watching the sun rise, he noticed something was wriggling in one of the saddlebags. He opened the bag, and pulled out little Vesta, who smiled innocently up at him.

"What are you doing in their?" She gurgled at him in response, before curling up in his lap and falling asleep. Hiccup stroked her side gently, wondering about what the future had in store for him. As he sat there, hanging in the sky above, he thought about the joy and happiness that the hatchlings " who were just entering juvenile age " and took comfort in the fact that his child would bring just as much joy to them all.

_I knew you would come around. _Toothless smiled. Hiccup couldn't help but smile back. They stayed that way for a long time. As Hiccup sat there, absentmindedly stroking Vesta, the juvenile gurgling quietly in her sleep, his mind wandered to how good the last five years had been to him. Well, mostly anyway. He remembered the day when he proposed to Astrid in the old cove on Raven's Point; that time when he and Toothless had play fought on Itchy Armpit (they never did change the name); the ceremony that had been put on to celebrate his eighteenth birthday; the first time he had made love to Astrid, way out beyond the forest, on the beach that surrounded the northern side of the island, with the stars and the moon illuminating their first tentative expressions of adoration for each other. They had been some good times, mixed with a few bad times, but then that was what life was about, Hiccup thought. We have the good times, the great times, the bad times, and hopefully few regrets. Hiccup didn't really have any, thank Thor, except for one. But then Astrid had forgiven him for that, and didn't really care to begin with, for whilst Astrid had given her virginity to Hiccup, he hadn't exactly returned the favour!|

* * *

><p>Five Years Previouslyâ€|

Hiccup was exhausted. He had spent the whole day chasing a group of terrible terrors out of the village stores, but with the help of Astrid and Fishlegs and their dragons, they had made a good job of it. Now he trudged into the house, only to be met with it being empty, save for a note on the table, written in his father's surprisingly neat handwriting.

Dear Hiccup

Gobber and I are in an emergency meeting with another chieftain whose tribe has been destroyed by Alvin's marauders. We will probably be here all night, considering recent events. There's some stew on the fire, just help yourself.

Dad

Hiccup read the note, then threw it on to the table as he took down a bowl and filled it, sating the hunger he had built up from the day's work. As he chewed on the chicken and potato stew " which in fairness to his dad, was actually pretty good " he heard a noise from upstairs. Then he remembered their guest " Heather, the girl who had been stranded by pirates.

"Hi, Heather." He said as she came downstairs.

"Hey, Hiccup."

"Do you want some stew? It's still hot, and pretty good too."

"No thanks." She smiled. Hiccup had found her smile to be oddly attractive, as if both seductive and innocent at the same time. "I ate some earlier. And it was very nice." She sat at the table, absentmindedly playing with a small acorn in her hand. "I never had the chance to properly say thank you."

"For what?" Hiccup asked between mouthfuls.

"For saving me." She said. "Those pirates were really nasty." Hiccup could have sworn she hesitated when she said pirates. He shrugged it off as exhaustion.

"That's ok. We wouldn't just abandon someone out there like that." Hiccup thought about that in his head for a moment. "Well, Snotlout might for about five minutes before someone came along and beat some sense into him." Heather laughed furiously at that. Her rich, lilting chuckles had Hiccup smiling too.

"I'm sure you wouldn't." Heather placed her hand over Hiccup's. She was relieved when he didn't pull it away. "But I still want to thank you for what you did. Properly, I mean." Hiccup was not exactly clued in to the social graces, but he wasn't a complete idiot, and he was pretty sure he could see where this was going.

"Please, it really was no trouble -"

"Hiccup." She grabbed his hand as he tried to get up and leave. "Please. Ever since the attack, I've been frightened at everything. I keep seeing the fires on the ship whenever I close my eyes, hearing the screams of the others every time it's quiet." Hiccup had not expected this. He had not expected tears. "But when I saw you, I wasn't afraid anymore. I don't know why, but you make me feel safe." Suddenly, she threw herself at him, clinging to him with desperate need. "Please, Hiccup, don't turn me away now." This was not at all what he expected: an attractive girl, who he had only met two days ago, had just thrown herself at him in a show of needy affection, almost to the point of begging him to return the favour. Anyone else might have been able to deal with this, but Hiccup was overwhelmed.

"Um, Iâ€œ This is a lot to take in, Heather." He placed his hands on her shoulders and pushed her off his body, steadyng her in front of him. "I mean, we only met two days ago. This is one Hel of a big jump you're proposing here."

"I know. But I feel safe with you. I don't know why, butâ€œ She took a deep breath. "I've never felt like this around anyone before."

"Wellâ€œ Hiccup rubbed his hand through his hair, unsure of how to reply. He plumped for honesty. "I won't deny that I'm not interested. I mean, you are an attractive woman, anyone can see that, butâ€œ "

"Butâ€œ Heather looked straight into his eyes, her own shimmering, as if on the verge of tears. Hiccup looked back, and saw that she truly was scared. Whether it was the trauma of the attack, or the suddenness of events the last few days, or if she was genuinely

attracted to him he couldn't tell, butâ€œ! He knew that if he pushed her away now, she would snap. And regardless of the situation, he couldn't bring himself to do that. So instead he smiled at her, and pulled her into a tender hug.

"But nothing." He said. "I won't abandon you." She reached back, and looked at him with a grateful, relieved expression, before she leaned forward tentatively and gently kissed him. As he kissed back, he felt her hands wrap around his neck, and instinctively placed a hand on her lower back, whilst he brought the other behind her head, gently stroking her silky soft hair. Their embrace soon became more passionate, and he broke off the kiss to gasp for air.

"I think we might want to take this upstairs." He smiled between gulps. She smiled back at him mischievously, before he took her hand and led her upstairs, thanking all the gods he knew of that his father was going to be a long time coming home.

It was obvious to them both that this was the first time for both of them, but they didn't care about how clumsy they were as they ripped their clothes off, or when they bashed their noses together in their heated embrace, or when they collapsed roughly onto his bed. Foreplay never occurred to them; they were too desperate to feel each other's most intimate embrace. She looked nervously into his eyes, her legs wide open, as he gently lowered himself into her. The sharp pain of her hymen breaking soon vanished as they picked up a slow clumsy rhythm. They were quiet, not to avoid detection, but because they didn't want to break the fragile atmosphere that was around them. They kissed deeply as he gently stroked in and out of her, drawing delightful little gasps from her lips. Suddenly, her eyes widened, and she clamped her lips shut before furiously kissing him, just as he felt the walls of her opening clamp down around him, bringing about his own, blissful release. They lay there for hours, falling asleep in each other's arms.

When Hiccup woke up, she had already left. But the memory of the previous night brought a smile to his face, even five years later, married to another woman and about to become a father.

* * *

><p>Hiccup looked off into the distance, wondering.</p>

Do you think she was genuine? He asked.

You mean, was she using you to get at the Book of Dragons? Toothless answered. _I think that's really for you to decide. But if you want my opinion, I was sleeping outside the house on that night._

_Wait, you were?!

_Yes, I was. And no, I don't blame you. You were young, carefree and at that point you weren't really mated to Astrid yet. I know one thing for sure. _Toothless turned to look at Hiccup, his green eye reflecting something it rarely did â€œ wisdom. _If she was deceiving you, I didn't see it. And it takes an awful lot more than human skill at lying to deceive a dragon. _Hiccup smiled at Toothless, stroking his neck affectionately, realizing just how much he depended on the lithe, sable reptile.

_Thanks, Toothless. That means a lot. _Toothless purred satisfactorily in his throat, before adjusting his flight. They stayed that way for a few moments, before Toothless noticed Cloudjumper approaching from behind.

Hiccup, I know you don't like surprise, so I'd better tell you that Cloudjumper's coming.

Toothless looked meaningfully up at his rider, who had the look of a man about to meet his fate. Hiccup nodded at him, and they turned back towards the village.

* * *

><p>Hiccup walked up to the door of the house, hand in hand with Valka. Things seemed strangely quiet about the village, but comfortably so, as if the whole world was content to just let everything pass it by. As he approached the door, he let go of her hand.</p>

"It's alright, mom." He smiled at her confused look. "I think this time, I should do this on my own." She smiled her understanding, and squeezed his hand encouragingly. Taking a deep breath, he opened the door and slowly walked into the house. He saw Ruffnut sitting at the table, bags under her eyes from the long night. She smiled at him, a genuine smile in the place of her usual smirk, and he placed an appreciative hand on her shoulder as he passed her on the way to the stairs. He climbed the stairs slowly, knowing without looking that Valka had followed him inside. As he reached the top of the stairs, he saw Astrid lying on the bed, underneath a thick fur blanket. She looked up at his approach, and gave him the most joyous smile she had ever given anyone. It was then that he noticed, or rather processed the notice of, the small bundle of blankets she was holding. He couldn't help but smile as he walked gently towards her. He squeezed her hand as he smiled at her, before she offered him the bundle. He gently took it from her, and when he looked inside, his heart melted. He sat down on the chair next to the bed, and laid eyes for the first time on his sleeping daughter.

"I told you she wanted to say hello." Astrid chuckled weakly. Hiccup could barely speak as he beamed at her, his eyes shimmering with ecstasy beyond expression. He could see that she already had his hair, rich brunette and wavy, as well as Astrid's button nose. As he held her, she woke up, and smiled up at her father, liquefying whatever was left of his already over melted heart. Her eyes were the best thing though; instead of one colour, the left eye was green, like his, and her right eye was electric blue, like Astrid's.

"What will we call her?" He asked quietly.

"I haven't thought of any names yet. I wanted you to be here." She answered. Hiccup thought for a moment, racking his brains for a good name. As they sat there discussing names, Toothless quietly climbed into the window, with Vesta curled up on his head. He sniffed gently over towards Hiccup and the baby, and he put his hand out to gently stroke his nose.

_Its ok, bud. Come and meet your new niece. _Toothless looked over into the pile of blankets, looking at the newcomer to his eyrie. The

little girl gurgled happily, stroking his nose as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world. Hiccup and Astrid shared a smile.

_She has your spirit, Hiccup. _Toothless concluded. _She will change the world one day. I don't know how yet, but she will. _He nudges Hiccup's cheek affectionately, before sitting back on his firestone. As he did, Vesta jumped off his neck and padded over to Hiccup, where she promptly jumped up on his lap. She cooed up at the Viking, before peering into the blankets. The baby girl put her hand out, which Vesta gently sniffed. Toothless perked up at this, his attention undivided away from their daughters. Vesta suddenly stopped sniffing, and, her eyes closed, gently placed her snout in the little girl's hand. Toothless and Hiccup shared a knowing look, and in that moment they knew that they would be inseparable.

"I think I have one." Hiccup said. Astrid looked at him, imploring him to continue. "What aboutâ€¢" He looked out of the window, and saw Traask's airship slowly and silently come into land at the beach. He smiled.

"What about Artemis?" Astrid smiled, and he knew they had got it right.

"Artemis it is." She whispered, leaning into his shoulder, smiling down at their baby.

Hiccup?

Hmhm?

You called her my new niece. Toothless looked at him curiously.

_Yes. _Hiccup smiled at Toothless. _I did._

* * *

><p>Meanwhile, on the icy straits of Svalbard, the slaver's camp was in ruins. Most of the slavers were dead, and five of the dragon riders were holding their leader down on his knees, as their chieftain inspected the camp. The slaver chief spat a globule of blood from his mouth, before shouting at the wild-haired woman<p>

"How dare you attack me like this! What gives you the right to attack my camp, kill my men and steal my property?" At that, she dealt him a blow across his face with the flat of her sword.

"They are not things!" She shouted at him in his native tongue. "They are not your property, nor are they anyone else's. I am not taking them from you, I am freeing them!"

"Why?" He spat back. "What gives you the right to do this?" He leered at her, waiting for an answer. As she uncovered her face though, his look of indignance turned to one of fear. "No. You cannot be!"

"Oh yes I can." She snarled, before sliding her sword into his heart. She swiftly pulled it from his chest, his body falling forward onto the ice. As she cleaned her sword on his furs, she asked, "How many are left?"

"Only one, my lady." Her first lieutenant, a tough Iroquois man named Two Bears answered. "We believe him to be a recruit, barely been with them more than a week."

"Good." She answered, sheathing her cleaned blade. "Then he can be useful to us." She marched over to the prisoner, and grabbed him bodily by his collar lifting him clean off the ice.

"Do you know who I am?" She asked. He shook his head, terrified. She smiled. "Good, then you can be both relieved of your ignorance and a reliever of others' ignorance." She dropped him on the ice, then drew her sword and pointed it straight at his chest. "We are going to let you go. When you finally arrive back at civilization, you are going to tell them who sent you, who you owe your entire existence to, and warn them that if I ever catch anyone like this, I will deal to them the same crushing blow I have dealt here. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes!" He stuttered. "But who are you?" The woman smiled, her wild, blonde hair messed up by the arctic wind, and relished the moment before answering:

"My name... is Camicazi."

15. The Once and Future Queen

Greetings, dear readers, and welcome to chapter 15, where we see curious developments in the far-off land of Norway, a revelation or two from an unlikely source, the formation of an unlikely partnership, the beginnings of the greatest legend in history and the author finally making use of his self-inflicted plot devices! I cannot believe the number of followers this story has garnered - I'm not exactly sure how many, but it's definitely passed the 100 mark - and I cannot thank you enough for placing your faith and admiration in what has essentially been a series of literary ramblings that I've cobbled together into what is becoming a rather more interesting story than I first had planned all those moons ago. I only hope I can continue to impress and entertain as much as I hope you all are. To those of you who were here from the start, you have my eternal thanks, and for those of you who came later, I sincerely hope you have enjoyed this story thus far.

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* * *

><p>The Once and Future Queen

Jormungandr tasted the winds, a criss-crossing mess of gusts and breezes brought on by a storm a few miles away, hunting down his prey. Scents could often be lost in such conditions, and anywhere else in the world, he would have given up. But not here, hanging high above the frozen, sterile wastes of Svalbard. Up here, there were no scents coming from the ground to interfere, only the cold, never ending sting that was the ice.

He caught a whiff of his target, a sharp, pungent odour, coming from his right. He tracked it back across a series of gusts, and found the trail, diving straight down towards the icy fjord below, his rider trusting him to track that which she could not see, hear or sense in any way. Camicazi drew her bow, a masterfully constructed weapon, made from yew, with bronze inlays decorating its length, and nocked an arrow, a deadly barb destined to end the life of her bounty.

As Jormungandr drew closer to the waterline, he spotted their enemy, and growled a warning to his rider. Peering through her thick goggles, she saw him too – an enemy rider, atop a vicious emerald Thunder Shrike. She pulled back on the bowstring, her hand resting on her cheek as she stared down the arrow and into the far distance. She closed her eyes for a moment, and when they opened, they had changed to the sharp senses of a true hunter. In her mind's eye, she saw the man, lined up her arrow on his back, and then let her mind sit back for a moment, trusting in her body, her muscles and senses, to strike true. She let the arrow fly, and was rewarded with the sight of the dragon and rider crashing to the surface. She reckoned her arrow had hit his leg, piercing straight through the dragon's hide and puncturing its lung.

Jormungandr dived, flaring his wings near the surface and bringing them both to a gentle glide, stopping next to their downed enemies. Camicazi immediately noticed that the rider had been stupid enough to try and pull himself free, wrenching his leg off the arrow, and leaving his dragon for dead.

"Jormungandr, pin him down." She commanded, and the lithe white reptile immediately leapt up, pouncing at the rider, before grabbing his damaged leg in his jaws, effectively preventing any escape. "So, dragon rider," She laced the title with as much hate as sarcasm, her sneering expression betraying her rage that such a man would dare to call himself such. "You thought you could try it on with the best huntress this side of the Norwegian Tribes, did you?"

"Please," he spat at her, his fury at being captured equally palpable. "There are far more dangerous people I could have chosen to piss off."

"Really?" She sneered. "Do many of those command the respect of a Moson Mogoi?"

"I will admit, such a partnership is, impressive." He conceded. "But I have a Thunder Shrike at my side. And whilst the Mogoi are fierce, they do not share the same raw power as the Shrikes do!"

"Please." She laughed. "You had a Thunder Shrike, before I shot you both out of the sky and you decided to abandon her to save your own worthless ass, and your former ally does not have me pinned down by a badly damaged leg, stranded miles from anywhere on the freezing ice, with no hope of any rescue to speak of." She sat down on the ice next to him, curling her long, slender legs up under her body. "So, why don't we talk about the real reason I tracked you for two hundred miles, shall we?"

"And what would that be?"

"What do you know of the Serpentine?" She asked sweetly.

"The Serpentine?" He chuckled, almost convincingly. "The Serpentine is a fairy tale, a story to frighten children. Nothing more." She nodded at Jormungandr, who compressed his jaws around his leg, causing the man to howl in pain.

"Try again, friend, and this time, tell me the truth." She said, just as sweetly.

"What do you want me to say?" He asked desperately. "No one knows who he is. No one even knows what he is. Or she. Or they, for all I know. I've never actually met the Serpentine. I did one job for him, and I was hired through an agent, who was probably hired through an agent herself."

"Herself?" Camicazi pounced on the information he had just let slip. "So who was the agent, and where can I find her?"

"I never learnt her name. She just walked into a pub in Trolsevar one day and asked around for someone willing to do a job. Real quiet like, you know?"

"And you just took the job without asking for any details whatsoever?"

"Hey, she offered me a lot of gold for the job. I wasn't going to get all nosy about the biggest job offer of my life."

"That's fair enough, I suppose." She eyed a bulging pouch attached to his belt. "Is that what she paid you?"

"That's a quarter of it. The rest is in a saddlebag back on -" He was cut off by her cutting the pouch off his belt. "Hey, that's mine!"

"Not any more it isn't. Finders, keepers and all that. Plus, the job involved you destroying an entire nest of Night Fury hatchlings, so that makes this blood money." She stood up, stretching her back muscles from the long chase. "Besides, you won't be needing it anymore." She nodded at Jormungandr again, but this time, he twisted his head, tearing the man's leg clean off. "You won't survive for much longer out on this ice, alone and injured like that." She went up to the Shrike, untying the most useful saddlebags before cutting the saddle clean off. "So I guess you won't mind me taking these." She saw the arrow embedded in the dragon's chest, a pang of guilt blooming in her own. She never liked harming dragons. It was like killing a bit of her own soul when she did. The shaft had been snapped off when he pulled his leg away from her, and now it was bent and snapped inside her, holding the wound open to the biting cold. Infection was guaranteed, if frostbite didn't set in first.

Camicazi moved over to where the injury was, assessing the best way to heal it. The screams of her former rider were beginning to grate, so she drew her bow and shot him, dead. With silence ensured, she concentrated on the arrow. She knew there was no way she could safely physically extract it, not without causing more damage.

"Oh well." She said aloud to herself. "Nothing else for it." She took off her thick, fur lined gloves, revealing slender, pale hands that were marked with curious glyphs and symbols. Closing her eyes, she placed her hands on either side of the profusely bleeding wound. She

focussed her concentration on the wound, and suddenly, the symbols on her hands began to glow, a vibrant purple colour emanating from the runes, streams of energy flowing from her fingertips. The shaft of the arrow suddenly caught fire, turning to ash within seconds. Then, when the ash was cleared from her wound, siphoned off by an invisible vacuum force, the wound began to heal itself. Blood vessels rebuilt themselves, connecting where they had been torn, muscles knitted themselves back together, all driven by the strange violet energy that bounced from one fix to the next to the next. Finally, the dragon's skin sealed together over the repaired wound, her scales drawn back over the exposed flesh, and Camicazi's hands returned to normal. She slumped against the dragon, drained by the magic she had performed. While she caught her breath, the Shrike turned her head to nuzzle her hair in appreciation. She smiled at her patient, glad she could undo the damage she had caused. This is what I live for. She thought. To make the world just a little bit happier.

* * *

><p>The Red Dragon Inn, Trolsevar, Three Days Later

Camicazi sat back in the chair she occupied in the corner of the inn, right next to the fire, comfortably digesting the wonderful meal she had just finished. As the name suggested, she had found an inn in Trolsevar that accepted dragons and their riders, and Jormungandr was comfortably curled up in a specially designed stable out back. The Serpentine was still on her mind, and she was here to investigate the agent that had been sent here, but for now, she relaxed, taking a well-earned rest.

As she sat there, nursing a mug of local ale, her attention wandered to a woman standing at the bar. Camicazi was no stranger to the affections of another woman, and not in a purely friendly way. She had long ago come to terms with her sexuality, and found she preferred the company of her own gender in bed. Not that she was repulsed by men; indeed, she had entertained many a suitor over the years, but there was something about the way this woman's black tresses fell down her back, how her tunic hugged her body in all the right places, how her ample breasts were clearly accentuated by the tight garment she wore beneath her fur cloak, and though her legs were wrapped tightly in black fur leggings, they concealed nothing, her slender thighs teasing her as they went on for miles and miles.

Camicazi subtly pulled out her hairpin, letting her blonde locks cascade down her back, as she felt the familiar heat in her core, and between her thighs, which she was unconsciously rubbing together. She was probably going to have to resolve this in her room on her own, her slender fingers aptly relieving her fantasies, as willing partners were not easy to come by, especially further south, but there was no harm in trying.

Draining her mug, she got up from the table and sauntered over to the bar, casually leaning against it in such a way that she pressed her bust, of which she was very proud, into clear view.

"Another ale, please." She said to the barman, before pretending to notice the woman for the first time. "Hey there."

"Hey." She answered back, kindly enough.

"So, you come here often?" Camicazi had found that, whilst clichÃ© as all fuck, that line worked more times than you'd think.

"No, I've never been here before, actually." The golden-eyed girl admitted. "You?"

"Oh, I come here whenever I pass through town. Reasonable rates on rooms, and they like dragons here." She took a quaff of the ale that had just been placed in front of her. "I'm something of a, professional, dragon rider." She subtly boasted.

"Really?" The woman seemed invested in her conversation now. "So am I! Well, I'm not exactly the traditional dragon rider type, but, you knowâ€|"

"And what is the, traditional, dragon rider type?"

"Oh, you know, daring, brave explorers, spending their lives on the wing, fighting injustice, that sort of thing."

"Sounds like you admire that kind of dragon rider." Camicazi looked nonchalantly into her mug, swilling the contents passively. "Maybe a little more than admire. You sound like you're attracted to people like that, maybe even romanticise them a little."

"You have no idea." She sultrily confessed. In her head, Camicazi was excited. Finally! Some local tail! Yes!

"Well, not to brag, but I'm in a, ahem, similar line of work." She carefully placed her hand over hers, testing the waters. "I could show you my dragon, Jormungandr, if you like, and maybe we could go back to my quarters for a, private drink or two."

"That sounds pretty nice, actually." She slid her hand out from under Camicazi's to pay for her ale. "You know, I loved a dragon rider like that once. Didn't come to much in the end, but it was good while it lasted, and we parted on good terms. Well, mostly." She sighed, looking into the distance as she was wrapped up in the memory. "Good times."

"Sounds like it." Camicazi smiled. "Maybe you'll find someone like that again."

"Maybe." She nodded. "I certainly hope so. In the meantime, though, I -"

"Mama!" A young boy, no older than five or six, came running up to the pair.

"Artor! I thought you were asleep already."

"I couldn't sleep, mama. Too cold." Artor hugged her tightly, burying his face in her furs.

"Well, maybe mama can come help with that." She kissed him lovingly, before picking him up and turning to Camicazi. "I'm sorry we couldn't have that drink. Maybe another time?"

"I'm heading out tomorrow, unfortunately." Camicazi lied, realising a lost cause when she saw one.

"Ah well. It was nice meeting you anyway." As she went to leave, she turned back suddenly. "I didn't catch your name."

"Camicazi." She proffered her hand.

"Heather." Heather shook it, before turning away to put Artor to bed. Camicazi watched her go, not entirely upset that she had lost such a good catch. It was obvious that she could never compete for her heart, not against little Artor.

Ah well, she thought to herself, looking down at her slender, lightly calloused fingers. Looks like you guys are back on duty. She paid for her meal and the drinks, then went up to the room she had rented for the night. The moment she was inside, she locked the door and stripped off, her naked body detailed with a plethora of tattoos similar to the ones on her hands. She laid back on the bed, the fire keeping her warm, and gave in to her carnal instincts. In her mind, her slender fingers were those of Heather, blissfully, relentlessly pleasuring her. As she imagined Heather leaning over her, completely taking the lead, she gently began to rub the sensitive bead at the top of her opening, moaning quietly and happily. Closing her eyes, she pushed her fingers into her already damp entrance, first two, then three, then four, until eventually she was driving herself at full speed towards nirvana, moaning and cursing as she felt the tension of a good orgasm build up. Suddenly, she felt the rush towards the end, and went hell for leather and fisted herself over the edge, glad she was given a room in the farthest corner of the inn as she screamed profanities and soaked the bedsheets, wave after wave of bursting pleasure pumping through her body and out of her clitoris.

When she came down from the pleasure high, she got up on shaky legs and went over to the hot bath that had been warming up all evening. After relaxing in the hot water for an hour, she dressed for bed in an old tunic that came down to her knees, and drifted into a comfortable sleep that was filled with dreams of her and the golden-eyed brunette that had captured her imagination. I hope whoever the lucky man was, he treated her damned right.

* * *

><p>Berk, One Hundred and Fifty Miles from Trolsevar

It was the day after Artemis had been born; Astrid had mostly recovered from the ordeal, Hiccup was becoming accustomed to the idea of being a father, and the rest of the village was clamouring to see their future chieftain.

"You know, I have absolutely no problem with telling everyone to go away and leave us alone for a week, or five." Hiccup said, caring only for the wellbeing of his wife and child.

"Hiccup, it's traditional." Astrid argued, albeit gently. "Besides, she's their future chief. They have a right to see her."

"Yes they have a right to see her. And yes, she may be there chief

one day, if she chooses to be so. But right now, she's our daughter, she's barely a day old, and can you blame me for wanting to keep this wonderful ball of adorableness all to myself? I mean, ourselves, of course." Astrid laughed gently at her husband's antics, and she had to admit, he did have a point. She was their child, and she would love for nothing more than to hold her tight all day, every day for a month. But sooner or later, they were going to have to show her to the world, and that day might as well be today. She told him so, in her sweetest voice (which was a damn sight sweeter than she would ever admit to, she did have her pride as a warrior to consider, after all), and he relented.

And so, on that crisp spring morning, they both got dressed up, Astrid in her usual leggings and battle skirt, with a loose fitting fur tunic for comfort, and Hiccup in his now customary regalia, wrapped up their baby girl in a warm woollen blanket, and went downstairs to greet the crowd who had been there since the wee hours.

They met with Valka, who had been sleeping in a chair downstairs since yesterday. Hiccup hugged his mother tightly, the euphoria of yesterday's events still clinging to him. She smiled up at him.

"So," she said. "Are you ready?" Hiccup exchanged a quick look with Astrid, before nodding.

"We are." He said, his pride spilling over into his voice. Valka smiled proudly at him, before opening the door and stepping outside to hush the crowd. Astrid handed baby Artemis to him, squeezing his arm in encouragement, and, taking a deep breath, he slowly walked outside, his fake leg making an asymmetric dull clunk on the near-frozen floorboards every other step. He was greeted by a crowd of hushed Vikings, which was a surprise in itself. Normally, two Vikings constituted three arguments between four points of view, and large gatherings were quite rambunctious. But today, they were sober, excited and awed; it wasn't every day you witnessed the birth of a new chief. Hiccup walked into the centre of the semicircle of Vikings around him, his cloak slowly flapping in the breeze. Gently moving the blanket away from her face, he presented his daughter to the world.

"Vikings of Berk, I give you Artemis, of House Haddock." The silence was palpable, as the group collectively held their breath. Legally, Hiccup could still disavow her as future chief. But his father had avowed him, of all people, so he wasn't about to disavow his only granddaughter. "Your once and future Chieftain!"

"All hail Artemis!" Snotlout shouted. "Our once and future Chieftain!" The crowd roared back the sentiment, their own euphoria undeniable. The Haddock line, which had achieved so much, was fully secured once again, and all agreed that she would, one day, make a fine Chieftain.

And as he stood there, his tribe ecstatic over his daughter's birth, he felt something tug at his boot, and looked down to see little Vesta there. With a gummy smile, she jumped up to his shoulder, looking towards the rising sun with a look that said, everything is going to be gloriously good. He followed her gaze, and he found himself wholeheartedly agreeing with her.

* * *

><p>Toothless lazed in the cold sun, halfway up the steep crag that the Meade Hall was built into, watching the people below go about their business. Astragard had cosied up into him, and was resting her head across his forelegs, whilst the hatchlings, who had begun to reach juvenile age, frolicked and played around and on them both. Toothless sighed contentedly, not remembering the last time things had been this peaceful. He sincerely hoped it would last.</p>

As he sat there, he heard the distinctive beat of Stormfly's wings approaching, and called out to her. She landed on the ledge next to the pair, curling her legs up under her body.

I hope I'm not intruding. She said, after they greeted one another.

Not at all. Toothless reassured her. _We're just lazing out in the sun. Besides it's been far too long since we last talked like this, what with everything going on. _Astragard stirred beneath him, and he lifted his wing to let her stand up. He cocked his head questioningly, and she answered by licking his nose, before calling the hatchlings to her and flying off. As with any couple, they had their own way of communicating, little signals that they used only with each other.

Oh. Stormfly looked surprised. _Did I justâ€¦_

_No, no. Astra just thought we could use some alone time. _

Ok then, if you're sure. Stormfly smiled. _It has been a while._

That it has. How's Typhoon and the kids?

_They're good. He took them out on extended flight yesterday, won't be back until tomorrow. Does them good to spend time with their father. _

_Hmmm. _Toothless closed his eyes contentedly. _Do you remember the olden days, when it was just the five of us and the six of them?_

I certainly do. I remember there was a lot of crashing, a lot of chasing sheep, and somewhere in all that mess, there was usually a fight that needed breaking up. Normally by you, as I recall.

You're right. Although you helped usually.

You are alpha now, so I suppose it was all good training.

_Hmm. _Toothless looked down on the streets below, and noticed Astrid walking with Ruffnut, holding Artemis in her arms as the women fussed over her.

_Do you ever wonder what life would be like if I hadn't trusted Hiccup? _Toothless asked, looking at Stormfly with a rare look of seriousness.

_I've often _feared_ what it might be like._ She admitted. _I would probably still be trapped in that prison they used to keep us in, or dead. Why do you ask?_ Toothless looked back at the two women, his mind swirling with pensive thoughts.

No reason, really. Just wondering.

_What's wrong, Tooth? _Stormfly was always perceptive of her friend's innermost thoughts.

_Nothing really. It's just, everything is so _different _now. Everything just, works._

How do you mean?

I mean, nothing's wrong.

And that's a bad thing?

No, not at all, I justâ€¦ Toothless sighed, unable to think how to articulate his innermost feelings. _I just get the sense that we're on borrowed time. Like something's going to happen, and all this will be lost. It's like all the good things in our lives are an illusion, just waiting to be shattered._

Then you have learned the greatest lesson in being an alpha. They both looked up and saw Skullcrusher land beside them, a rare occasion indeed.

How do you mean?

_I used to be an alpha once. _The old dragon sat, watching the horizon as if recalling a halcyon memory. _I led a great eyrie, a thousand dragons beneath my wings. I had a mate, and many wonderful children. Every sunrise, I would look out over our island, and feel that same foreboding. It eventually consumed me, and I spent more time worrying than enjoying my family._ He sighed. _Eventually, my mate came to me and told me to stop worrying, to come back to our children. I saw the truth in her words, and from that day onwards, I was happy, content, and secure._

_What happened to them? _Stormfly asked, both the younger dragons now paying rapt attention. Skullcrusher visibly darkened before them.

They were killed. All of them.

By Drago?

_No. A monster. Some eldritch creature from beyond our skies. _He gave them the impression of a vast creature, with eyes of burning brimstone, and breath to match.

I was the only one to escape. It was on that day that I knew what that feeling that consumed me was.

_What was it? _Toothless asked.

_Fear, young one. Fear for those who are closest and most dear to you. All true alpha's feel it. _They looked up to see Astragard

teaching basic flying manoeuvres to the juveniles. Heed my warning, Toothless. Do not make my mistakes. Do not let the feeling consume you, but never ignore it. You do so at your peril. You will not know how much she means to you until you lose her. May fate grant that you never have to learn that lesson._ Toothless looked back at Astragard, his heart skipping a beat as it always did when he saw her, and thought on Skullcrusher's words as he took off back towards Eret's ship. Perhaps it was time that he shared these feelings with Hiccup.

* * *

><p>Trolsevar, the Next Day

Heather checked the saddlebags fastened to Windshear's back one last time, before stroking her gently behind her head and turning to retrieve Artor from the stables, where he was being gently tickled by Jormungandr. She smiled at the sight of Artor happily laughing and playing with the dragon. She saw Camicazi sitting cross legged next to the pair, laughing with the little boy. Heather almost felt sad for breaking up the joyous scene before her, but she had business back in the Archipelago, business she couldn't ignore. Camicazi noticed her then, and smiled up at the young woman, before standing up and walking over to her.

"Thanks for watching him for me." Heather smiled at her.

"It was nothing." Camicazi insisted. "In fact, it was a genuine pleasure." They both turned to watch Artor, who was now attempting to climb on the head of a very patient Jormungandr. They laughed as he fell off harmlessly onto the straw covered floor, and tried again to mount the dragon's cranium. "If you don't mind me asking, where is his father?" Camicazi almost sounded suspicious.

"Oh, he's not mine." Heather reassured her. "His father is a king in a faraway land. I was passing by that way when I was shot down by an army patrol. They would have captured Windshear and I were it not for the king's men saving me. They took me back to his castle, and he let me rest there until Windshear's wing was fully healed. When I asked if there was anything I could do to thank him, he begged me to take his son away with me."

"Why would he do that?" Camicazi was shocked at the revelation.

"The soldiers that shot me down were part of an army that was invading his kingdom. They were at war, and he was losing. He begged me to take Artor away from the fighting."

"Wow." Camicazi looked stunned, and at the same time saddened. "That's rough. I'm not sure I could have done that."

"He said that he would send a message when it was safe for him to return." Heather sighed. "I received one, by messenger hawk, a year later. It said that his armies had fallen, and that the kingdom was lost, and asked me to raise his son for him as my own, away from the chaos. And so I did. Now, he doesn't even know I'm not his real mother." Heather looked at Artor with an expression of melancholy. "I only hope I can do right by him."

"Well, I'd say you've done a pretty good job so far." Camicazi

smiled.

"Thanks." Heather smiled back. "Where I'm going now should be a good home for him." Heather thought for a moment, an idea forming in her mind. "You know, if you want, you could come with us. The people I'm going to would gladly accept you too." She could tell by the look on Camicazi's face that she was tempted.

"Thanks, Heather, but my place is here. I have some unfinished business to attend to, and if I don't, a lot of people could get hurt."

"If you say so." Heather hugged her new friend. "Remember this then: if you change your mind, simply head west by southwest for one hundred and fifty miles. When you reach the archipelago there, ask around for Trader Johann, and drop my name. He'll put you on the right path."

"Thanks. That might be the kindest thing that anyone's done for me in a long time. Maybe I will join you, when this is all over."

"I'll see you there then." Heather hugged her one last time, before turning to pick up Artor. As she carefully buckled him into the small seat she had fashioned into Windshear's saddle, Camicazi asked her, "That king you met, what was his name?"

"His name?" Heather said. "I think it wasâ€¦ ah, that's it! Uther Pendragon."

"Pendragon, huh?" Camicazi commented. "Looks like little Artor here is with the right people after all." Heather giggled at the joke, before mounting up and saying farewell to her new friend.

"I hope we meet again, Camicazi."

"Likewise." She waved them off as Windshear leaped into the air, angling towards the frozen sea, quickly shrinking into the distance. Camicazi really wished she could have gone with them, but such dreams would have to wait until the Serpentine was dealt with. Speaking of which, her lieutenant, Two Bears, walked into the stables.

"I have a lead." He said curtly.

"You do? Where?"

"Not where, who. There's someone here who can point us to the Serpentine. A man named Gaius." Camicazi nodded her approval, and followed Two Bears out into the street. Maybe, just maybe, they might finally be on the trail.

* * *

><p>Berk, Later that Night

Hiccup sat back in his father's chair, cradling Artemis, who was fast asleep, in his arms, marvelling at the appropriateness of the situation. Over twenty years ago, it would have been his father sitting here, cradling him in front of the fire. He smiled as Artemis gurgled in her sleep. She looked so peaceful, laying there in his arms. He smiled, gently kissing her forehead, before placing her in

the cot that he had made for her for the night. He could hear Astrid upstairs, gently snoring, and decided not to disturb her. As he grabbed his cloak, he imagined that she would probably try to kill him for leaving her out of the events that were to follow that night, but some instinct told him that he shouldn't tell her.

He stepped out into the cold night, wrapping the cloak around himself to protect from the wind, and made his way down to Eret's ship. He met Snotlout as he boarded the vessel, who silently directed him below deck. Hiccup climbed down the wooden steps into the cargo hold, and into the secret meeting he had called. Gobber, Eret, Snotlout, Fishlegs, Traask, Spitelout, the Twins and his mother were all standing around the makeshift table in the centre of the hold, illuminated by the lanterns hung around the edge of the room. On the table was a map, with various pencilled drawings and notes that Hiccup had made with their help, and the silver arrow that Toothless had found months ago. It was time to finally solve this mystery, and Traask may have found the answer.

"So," He addressed the group, taking off his cloak and laying it over a nearby barrel. "You all know why I have called you here tonight." He gestured towards the map and the arrow. "To whit, a mystery that needs an urgent answer. Toothless found this arrow months ago, just sitting in the snow out in the forest. A similar arrow was used to kill a would-be assassin in Nova Roma barely a couple of months later. An assassin who was paid to kill me. Had it not been for this mystery archer, he would have succeeded." The room dropped a few degrees, and not because of the weather. "Over the last six months, I have had members of this tribe, as well as other people, such as Trader Johann, looking discreetly for any information that might lead to the identity of this individual. So far, we've had no luck. They appear to have completely vanished off the face of the earth."

"I'm detecting an 'Until Now' coming." Snotlout spoke up.

"Until now." Hiccup confirmed. "Traask may have found a lead." He gestured for his uncle to explain.

"Two weeks ago, I had taken the Artemis to a town in the Germanic territories. We were there trading for local produce not normally found outside Germania, to whit some casks of local beers and ales, as well as native farm animals, to bolster our populations here. I came across an old friend of mine who had ties to the black market across the continent. I questioned him about the arrow and if he had any clues to its providence. Although he couldn't tell me anything about the arrow, he pointed me in the direction of someone who might, a dragon rider who operates across Scandinavia."

"A dragon rider?" Gobber asked.

"Yes." Traask affirmed. "A woman named Camicazi. The last he heard, she was hunting down slavers on Svalbard, but he knows for a fact that she returns regularly to a Norwegian port town called Trolsevar."

"Sounds charming." Ruffnut commented.

"Apparently it is." Traask sighed. "It's also a hundred and fifty miles away."

"Which is why I called us here." Hiccup intervened. "I need someone to lead a team out to Norway, to go to Trolsevar, find this Camicazi and find out what she knows. I can't go myself; I have too many responsibilities now."

"That's putting it mildly." Eret quipped.

"Neither can Traask. He needs to be here captaining the Artemis if we want to keep our supply chains intact." Hiccup placed the arrow back on the table, and placed his palms on its edge. "I'm not going to order anyone to go, I'm only going to ask. This mission is volunteers only." Hiccup looked meaningfully around the table. Eret stepped forward into the light.

"I'll go." He said. "I've never been on an extended flight solo before. Now's as good a time as any to get in the saddle." Hiccup nodded his thanks.

"Hel, I might as well." Snotlout said, drawing a hand over his scruffy beard. "It's been a while since I've got off the island. Hookfang will certainly enjoy stretching his wings again." Ruff and Tuff shared a look with each other, a look only the Twins could interpret.

"We'll go with." Ruffnut stepped up from the barrel she was sitting on. "Could be fun."

"Yeah." Tuffnut agreed. "Also, we know a guy, back from our 'Loki' days who usually has an ear to the ground."

"Good idea." Hiccup nodded at him, both impressed and slightly nervous as to this contact that the Twins seemed to have picked up. "In that case, I suggest you get some sleep and be ready to push off in the morning. One hundred and fifty miles is no easy distance, even on dragonback. We'll make sure you have enough supplies for the trip. Eret will be in charge of the mission. Traask, show him the way to Trolsevar and share with him what you know." Traask nodded in agreement. "Ok. So, on a lighter note, after much deliberation, and with things going so well here, I've decided to re-establish the Dragon's Edge." He pulled the map that led to the Edge from his pocket and rolled it across the table. "It's been a while since we've last been there, so it's probably in a state of disrepair. As such, I've decided that one of us should take our new students there, give them a taste of the wild. Any volunteers?"

"Oh, Hiccup, let me!" Fishlegs asked excitedly. He had been itching to get back to his Zen garden for a while now.

"Sure thing." Hiccup smiled at his friend's enthusiasm. "Organise an expedition out there to leave in a week's time. And now that's settled, I suggest we all get to bed. We all have a lot to do tomorrow." They departed from the ship, and went their separate ways. Hiccup was yawning in exhaustion by the time he reached his front door. Hanging up his cloak behind the bedroom door, he took off his tunic, crawled under the furs next to Astrid, who unconsciously curled into him, and promptly fell asleep, and let dreams of a happy future roll over him. As he did, he could not possibly have known what would begin tomorrow, how the chain of events that was not just his future, but all our futures, would have its first link forged. Considering what was to follow, perhaps it was for the best after

all.

End
file.